

**REVOLUTIONISM AS REVISIONISM:
EARLY BRITISH VIEWS OF BONAPARTE, 1796 - 1803.**

A thesis
submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of
Master of Arts in History
in the
University of Canterbury
by

PHILLIP J. GRAY

Department of History
University of Canterbury

1995

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have encouraged and supported me in many ways during the writing of this thesis, and I would like to take the opportunity to thank them here.

Pauline Wedlake, Judy Robertson and Rosemary Russo, secretaries in the Department of History, have offered invaluable general assistance. Pat Robertson at the Interloans Desk in the James Height Library has been of great assistance in the supply of books, pamphlets and newspapers, sometimes under trying circumstances. My father assisted with the formatting of the final version.

Dr. Marie Peters introduced me to British history, the eighteenth century and the use of newspapers as historical sources. I am sure that my writing has improved as a result of her trenchant and entirely justified criticism of my work in the past.

I am very grateful to Greg Ryan, Suzanne Doig and Damien Powell for commenting on chapters. Along with the aforementioned, I would like to thank Greig Fleming and Tracy Tulloch for their friendship and encouragement in academic life. For their friendship and support outside the History Department I thank especially Mark Balcar, Graham Muir, Stephanie Prosser and Rochelle Thickpenny.

My supervisor, Dr. John Cookson, has listened patiently to my more improbable ideas, and has been consistently approachable and supportive.

Finally, this thesis and all my academic achievements owe an enormous debt to my aunt, Lesley Johnston, who has demonstrated constant faith in me and continues to inspire me in everything I do.

PHILLIP J. GRAY

22 September 1995

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines British views of Napoleon Bonaparte from 1796 to 1803. It argues that a chronological approach is the most appropriate because of both the relative neglect of the subject, and because of faults in the existing historical literature. Generalisations in this literature have been formulated on the basis of evidence juxtaposed across the entire period between 1796 and 1815, which has resulted in a distorted picture in which shifts in perception cannot be detected. The treatment of events and themes in the historiography is also coloured by teleology and Whiggish assumptions, while the most recent study has compounded these problems through the application of sophisticated techniques of literary analysis.

This thesis attempts to avoid these errors in the construction of a clear picture of early British views of Bonaparte. The chapters are based on defined periods and explore the subject in event-based contexts. Material from outside the defined periods is not included, thus creating credible generalisations which reflect contemporary beliefs. The final chapter examines the deployment of the language of tyranny with reference to Bonaparte and comparisons made with Cromwell in the three years following his assumption of political power. The sources for the investigation are a selection of newspapers, pamphlets and magazines, and a section of the thesis is devoted to considering the implications of their use.

The thesis posits a shift in historical understanding from the intrinsic significance of a Great Man conception to an emphasis on the primacy of revolutionism. Napoleon Bonaparte was regarded as a revolutionary general actively involved in the transmission of republican ideologies in Italy and Egypt from 1796 - 99. The thesis argues that a shift in paradigm occurred after the coup of *Brumaire* in November 1799, which installed Bonaparte as the military ruler of a revolutionary state. The chronological examination of the news reporting and commentary in the years from 1800 - 1803 suggests that a further shift to seeing Bonaparte as a military dictator seems to have occurred. Although this shift has been difficult to locate precisely, it was probably stimulated by Bonaparte's assumption of office for life in the summer of 1802.

INTRODUCTION

The subject of contemporary British¹ views of Napoleon Bonaparte² is one in which historians have shown little interest. Aside from observations made in the context of examining anti-war liberal opinion in England by J. E. Cookson in *The Friends of Peace*,³ there has been no detailed examination of the topic in the last eighty years. The standard works remain F. J. MacCunn's *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, published in 1914, and Wheeler and Broadley's *Napoleon and the Invasion of England*, which is of the same vintage.⁴ Owing to their advanced age, these studies contain methods and assumptions unacceptable to modern historical practice. The most recent contribution to the subject, a dissertation by Stella Cottrell, subscribes to many of the same teleological and achronological assumptions characteristic of the older literature.⁵

¹ There are several terms here which require definition. The first, 'contemporary', is used in this study to mean views which were expressed within the five defined periods between 1796 and 1803. Historians of British views of Bonaparte have used the term too broadly, referring to opinions spread across the twenty years of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. The use of the term 'British' is not unproblematic, although it is the opinion of this writer that if an historian has attempted to use sources from Scotland, Wales and/or Ireland as well as England, then s/he is justified in claiming that their work is representative of 'British' opinion. This study broadly follows the use in Linda Colley *Britons. Forging the nation, 1707 - 1837* (New Haven, 1992, corrected paperback edition, 1994), p. 8. The only study which touches sketchily on Irish views of Bonaparte, particularly those of the United Irishmen, is Marianne Elliott *Partners in Revolution. The United Irishmen and France* (New Haven, 1982), pp. 276 - 281, 298 - 302, while the only indications of Welsh opinion comes with the comment that 'the trend of opinion in Wales towards the French Revolution followed closely that in England.' E. H. Stuart Jones *The Last Invasion of Britain* (Cardiff, 1950), p. 29.

² For the sake of consistency this thesis has adopted the spelling 'Bonaparte', which was used fairly consistently after 1799. The Italianate 'Buonaparte' was used before this date.

³ J. E. Cookson *The Friends of Peace. Anti-war liberalism in England, 1793 - 1815* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 169 - 176.

⁴ F. J. MacCunn *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon* (London, 1914) and H. F. B. Wheeler and A. M. Broadley *Napoleon and the Invasion of England. The Story of the Great Terror. With numerous illustrations from contemporary prints, caricatures etc. Eight in colour.* 2 vols. (London, 1908).

The major reason for the neglect of this subject has been a wider failure to examine British attitudes towards the events of the French Revolution⁶ after Great Britain declared war on France in February 1793. Especially overlooked have been the years 1795 - 1799, the period when the revolutionary Terror was replaced by the oligarchical Directories.⁷ Napoleon Bonaparte first appeared in the British consciousness in this period, and this thesis will argue that his initial conception as a revolutionary was fundamental in shaping his reputation over the following seven years.

* * * * *

Much of the older literature about British views of Bonaparte is expansive in nature. Its generalisations are broad in both methodological and chronological senses. Wheeler and Broadley's account is of French plans and attempts to invade Great Britain between 1796 and 1805, and it makes sweeping statements generalising across this entire decade. The following is not untypical:

⁵ Stella Cottrell 'English views of France and the French, 1789 - 1815', D. Phil. dissertation, Oxford University, 1990. A section of this dissertation, although not the chapter dealing in particular with Bonaparte, was published as 'The Devil on two Sticks: franco-phobia in 1803' in Raphael Samuel (ed.) *Patriotism. The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity* volume I. *History and Politics* (London, 1989), pp. 259 - 273.

⁶ The terms 'Revolution' will be used in this study to denote the events in France between 1789 and 1799. 'Revolutionism' refers to the republican ideologies the French attempted to transmit to the other peoples of Europe from 1792, while 'revolutionary' is used as an adjective, and to mean someone associated with these events.

⁷ Historians of British attitudes towards the French Revolution have demonstrated a tendency to extend the arguments of the years 1789 - 93 as evidence of beliefs in the following five years. The Convention, and especially the Directories, have received little attention. The essays in the recent collections *Britain and the French Revolution* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke, 1989), edited by H. T. Dickinson, and *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge, 1991), edited by Mark Philp, are good examples of this. The nearest attempt is probably Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, pp. 143 - 169, although what is needed is a detailed exploration of British attitudes towards the successive revolutionary governments.

Far from regarding Bonaparte as a saviour and an envoy of Utopia, many of the country folk firmly believed that he ground the bones of his own maimed soldiers in the dust beneath his chariot-wheels, and found his chief pleasure in listening to the groans of the dying; in a word, that he was the devil in sheep's clothing... Stories about the "Corsican monster," especially those of an atrocious character, gained wide circulation.⁸

Hatred is also one of the chief defining characteristics of MacCunn's account. Constructing his model along party political lines, MacCunn claims that the Tories detested Bonaparte because he had usurped legitimate government and the Whigs because he had betrayed their hopes of a moderated Revolution. The ordinary man is presented as hating Bonaparte because he was the most significant individual ever faced by Britain, and because of financial pressure towards the end of the Napoleonic war.⁹ Whether such comments are an accurate appraisal of the state of feeling in the 1810s is not at issue. The point is that, like Wheeler and Broadley, MacCunn juxtaposes evidence between different events, and within the entire period 1796 to 1815. This approach has not allowed his study to assess shifts in the relative significance of themes, and unable to identify shifts in paradigm. When generalising about British opinions of Bonaparte during the expedition to Egypt in 1798 - 9, MacCunn cites both a polemical pamphlet from 1803 and a rhymed satire from June 1798. This juxtaposition does not allow him to draw attention to the most significant feature of the rhyme, its revolutionary topoi. The indication that the expedition was regarded by satirists in 1798 as an ideological exercise is overshadowed by the simultaneous citation of comments made five years later, comments written in different contexts and almost certainly prompted by different concerns.¹⁰

⁸ Wheeler and Broadley, *Napoleon and the Invasion of England*, vol. I, p. 80.

⁹ MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, pp. 266 - 267.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 15. To be fair, both Wheeler and Broadley and MacCunn's accounts make isolated comments with which this study agrees, and these are acknowledged in the

There is also a tendency in the existing literature to depict early parts of Bonaparte's career as inevitably presaging his later achievements. This Whiggishness¹¹ is most obvious in generalisations about the Egyptian expedition, which is cast as the first step along the path which would lead to the assumption of domestic rule in France in November 1799, and of the imperial dignity five years later. Such a teleological approach appears to stem from a fascination with Bonaparte's personal qualities (as opposed to contemporary views of these qualities). Historians have been too heavily influenced by Bonaparte's later successes in their assessment of British beliefs about the early parts of his career. Wheeler and Broadley state that as early as 1797 - 8, Bonaparte was regarded as cultivating the people around him in preparation for power; that 'Even now he was gathering about him the men who were to be his marshals and the future pillars of his throne.'¹² It is certainly not the intention of this study to argue that the British did not see Bonaparte in political terms. But it is unjustifiably Whiggish to imply that commentators could have possessed foreknowledge that Bonaparte was to assume a position of political authority.

Wheeler and Broadley's attempts to link Bonaparte with a succession of invasion attempts against Great Britain, and their concentration in particular on the invasion crisis of 1803 - 4, injects further teleology into their account. Undue emphasis is placed on the flood of literature produced in these years as containing all the information necessary for a comprehensive account of British attitudes towards Bonaparte. Much of the narrative in *Napoleon and the Invasion of England* is constructed backwards from 1803 - 4; the previous seven years

footnotes where applicable. But the fact remains that the credibility of these comments is rendered suspect because of their basis in juxtaposed evidence.

¹¹ This term is used in the sense argued by Herbert Butterfield in *The Whig interpretation of history* (Cambridge, 1931).

¹² Wheeler and Broadley, *Napoleon and the Invasion of England*, vol. I, p. 88.

are depicted as 'building up' to this monumental confrontation between Napoleon and The British People.¹³ The narrative doggedly criticises contemporaries who did not foresee the 'inevitable' resumption of war in 1803, and congratulates those it regards as having the 'foresight' to do so.¹⁴ At one point the authors do acknowledge that 'There is a very marked divergence between the state of public opinion in England during the two phases of the Great Terror, divided from each other by the Treaty of Amiens and the brief cessation of hostilities which ensued',¹⁵ but they fail to elaborate on this postulated 'marked divergence'. Many of the statements in Wheeler and Broadley's volumes might very well be accurate appraisals of the mood of the British public in the summer of 1803.¹⁶ But it is obviously inaccurate to imply, as their narrative does, that these sentiments can be used to assess British views of Bonaparte across the entire period from 1796 to 1805.¹⁷

The credibility of generalisations in the older accounts is rendered further questionable by the intrusion of present-centredness. The authors of *Napoleon and the Invasion of England* acknowledge that their work was prompted by fears about the undefended state of Britain's northern and eastern coasts in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁸ The jingoistic self-congratulation into which Wheeler and Broadley's volumes occasionally lapse is at its worst in the sections on the national mood in 1803, where it is claimed that: 'It is a fortunate characteristic of the British that when once they are aroused they do not cease

¹³ *ibid.*, vols. I and II, *passim*; see especially vol. I xii, pp. 210 - 211. The reader will recognise the illustrative irony in the use of these terms.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 197; vol II, p. 38.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 195.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 104.

¹⁷ For an explicit statement of this, see *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 255: 'The continuity of the literary and artistic landmarks of the Great Terror was scarcely interrupted.'

¹⁸ *ibid.*, vol. I, xxxi.

their vigilance or doggedness until affairs are put to rights, otherwise the Empire would long since have perished.¹⁹ This writer is aware of the hubristic temptation of excessive criticism when examining the work of one's predecessors; all studies are shaped to a certain extent by the intellectual currents of their time. The preceding comments are recounted not from any position of superiority, but because they undermine the reader's trust that the evidence used in the narrative was not selected to illustrate contemporary concerns.

The most recent study which has contributed to historical knowledge of British views of Bonaparte perpetuates some of these faults, although it avoids present-centredness, except perhaps in a methodological sense. Stella Cottrell's Oxford doctoral dissertation is entitled 'English views of France and the French, 1789 - 1815', and thus an examination of attitudes towards Bonaparte is subsumed into wider lines of enquiry. Cottrell has applied sophisticated techniques of literary criticism to her sources, and this has allowed her to make innovative and significant generalisations about English responses to the French Revolution and the resulting wars. It is probably inevitable that these methods have also led to a study which fails to enunciate clear chronological boundaries to its generalisations. The chapter specifically on Bonaparte follows the precedent established in the older literature, making generalisations based on evidence from periods as widely separated as the Egyptian expedition of 1798 - 9 and the final stages of the Napoleonic war in 1814 - 15. The statement that the most significant characteristic attributed to Bonaparte was that of being a social climber is sourced from broadsides and prints from 1810, for instance.²⁰

¹⁹ *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 38.

²⁰ Cottrell, 'English views of France and the French', p. 214. Although Cottrell does provide some in-text comments about where the evidence she is dealing with at that particular point is coming from (i.e. pp. 218, 223, 228), the overall impression is still that the statements apply across the entire period.

Cottrell occasionally qualifies statements chronologically within her text, but such comments are proffered infrequently, and are not a substitute for a careful and thorough chronological approach.²¹

These criticisms need to be tempered by awareness that Cottrell's study is not concerned specifically with opinions about Bonaparte. The dissertation focuses primarily on analysing the English reaction to the French, and explores the resulting construction of English identities between 1789 and 1815.²² An examination of the relationship between mass 'patriotism' and the mass ephemera published in 1803 - 4 is the other aim.²³ Cottrell is also usually careful to emphasise that her sources are the cheaper mass tracts, although she does claim at one point that her statements are also representative of the more expensive publications.²⁴ This thesis does not question whether or not Cottrell's generalisations are representative of the content of the former; indeed, by its very nature the cheaper literature might very well be the location of the stock themes emphasised in the historical literature. Rather, it assesses the degree to which her comments are accurate generalisations about the content of the more expensive publications.

* * * * *

It is this writer's contention that a study which aims to test the received belief that hatred was the major feature of British views of Bonaparte must examine evidence within defined chronological boundaries, in order to avoid

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 225.

²² *ibid.*, Introduction p. 1, Chapter 1, pp. 6 - 7 and 10 - 12.

²³ As argued in her fifth chapter of the dissertation, 'Propaganda and Patriotism in 1803', pp. 252 - 297.

²⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 207 - 208; given her profession not to have studied the more expensive literature in detail, this is not a generalisation Cottrell is qualified to make.

generalisations made on the basis of juxtaposed evidence. Chronological approaches to the study of history are currently rather unfashionable, but this should not detract from awareness of their value in the construction of a clear account. This is particularly relevant to a topic where a body of older literature remains definitive, and where the latest contribution to the subject has repeated and compounded many of its faults.

This study adopts such an approach. It begins with the first point at which Bonaparte came to the attention of the British, his campaign in Italy in the summer of 1796, and traces his reputation over the following seven years, concluding in the weeks before the resumption of war between Britain and France in May 1803. The following chapters are each based on a defined, event-based period. Material from outside these periods has not been included, thereby creating an account which can posit reliable generalisations based on analysis of information in its chronological contexts.

The sources for this study are a selection of the newspapers, magazines and pamphlets which were published between 1796 and 1803. Sampling techniques have been applied consistently. The daily newspapers *The Times*, the *Morning Post* and the *Morning Chronicle* were sampled twice-weekly, alternating Mondays and Wednesdays with Tuesdays and Thursdays. This has provided regular comprehensive coverage of most days of the week, and allowed for consideration of both the regular and irregular reception of news.²⁵ Every second issue of the evening and Sunday newspapers *The Observer*, *Bell's Weekly Messenger* and the *Leeds Mercury* has been examined, while each issue of the *The Annual Register*, *The Aberdeen Magazine*, the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *Critical and Monthly*

²⁵ The single exception to this is *The Times* in October 1801, when the news of the conclusion of peace preliminaries arrived on a Saturday. To have ignored this would have been to ignore the immediate reaction to one of the most significant events associated with Bonaparte.

Reviews has been examined. The nature of these sources is discussed in the following section, entitled 'The press, society and public opinion in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.'

* * * * *

Chapter One examines the eighteen months from the spring of 1796 until the winter of 1797 - 8. In this period Bonaparte fought a successful campaign in Italy against the Austrians, Britain's major continental allies, before creating and administering republics based on the French model. Chapter Two examines the eighteen months from the winter of 1797 - 8, when Bonaparte was rumoured to be preparing an invasion of Great Britain in the following spring, until his return to Europe from Egypt in the autumn of 1799. Chapter Three examines the six months following the coup of *Brumaire* which installed Bonaparte at the head of a revolutionary government in France in November 1799. Chapter Four examines the eighteen months of European peacemaking from the summer of 1800, until the conclusion of peace between France and Great Britain in the autumn of 1801. Chapter Five examines the events of the Peace of Amiens, between late 1801 and April 1803. The final chapter is an exploratory analysis of the deployment of the language of tyranny with reference to Bonaparte between 1800 and 1803.

* * * * *

THE SOURCES

The press, society and public opinion in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The sources for this study include examples of most of the printed publications which existed in Great Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The use of these publications as historical sources cannot be treated as unproblematic. Given their varying generational dynamics, to say nothing of potentially differing degrees of social and geographical penetration, it would be a dubious practice to treat these sources as a united body. The following paragraphs will explore the relationship between the press and society in late eighteenth-century Britain, and examine in more detail the three major kinds of publication used in this study: newspapers, pamphlets and magazines. It will then consider cautionary comments which have been offered about the use of these publications as historical sources.

* * * * *

The study of the British press in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries lags considerably behind the burgeoning research in the mid-eighteenth,¹ although some valuable work has been published. The lion's share of

¹ Michael Harris and Alan Lee 'General Introduction' and 'Introduction' in *ibids.* (eds.) *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries* (London and Cranbury, N.J., 1986), pp. 13 - 15 and 19 - 24; Jeremy Black 'The development of the provincial newspaper press in the eighteenth century', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14, 2, Autumn 1991, pp. 159 - 70; John Brewer *Party ideology and popular politics at the accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 139 - 160; Marie Peters 'Historians and the Eighteenth-Century English Press: A Review of Possibilities and Problems', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 34, 1988, and Peters *Pitt and popularity. The patriot minister and London opinion during the Seven Years' War* (Oxford, 1980) esp. pp. 16 - 24, are among the most useful.

this has been devoted to the publication and distribution of the newspapers.² The polemical pamphlet and the published sermon, which remained significant features of the genre, have been overlooked. This relative neglect means that when considering the generation, publication and distribution of the press, these occasional publications must be included in generalisations derived from research into newspapers. This writer has distinct reservations about such an approach, but in the absence of discrete research into the circulation and social penetration of the pamphlets and published sermons, research on the newspapers must be accepted as the existing state of knowledge on the matter.

The nature of the publications consumed rather than technological change seems to have been the most significant development in the British press in the early nineteenth century. The introduction of the Koenig steam press on *The Times* in 1814 signalled the beginning of technological change in the industry, but this did not lead to increased circulations for almost twenty years.³ The

² Arthur Aspinall 'The circulation of newspapers in the early nineteenth century', *The Review of English Studies* 22, 85, January 1946, pp. 29 - 43; the still standard Arthur Aspinall *Politics and the Press c. 1780 - 1850* (London, 1949); more recently, Ivon Asquith 'Advertising and the Press in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: James Perry and the *Morning Chronicle*, 1790 - 1821', *The Historical Journal* 18, 4, 1975, pp. 703 - 724; Ivon Asquith, 'The Whig Party and the Press in the early Nineteenth Century', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 49, 120, November 1976, pp. 264 - 283; Ivon Asquith 'The structure, ownership and control of the press: 1780 - 1855' in George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate (eds.) *Newspaper history: from the 17th century to the present day* (London, 1978), pp. 98 - 116; Cookson, chapter on 'The liberal press' in *The Friends of Peace*, pp. 84 - 114; I. R. Christie, chapter 'British Newspapers in the Later Georgian Age' in *Myth and Reality in Late-Eighteenth-Century British Politics and Other Papers* (London, 1970), pp. 311 - 333; Harris and Lee, 'General Introduction'; Karl Schweizer and Jeremy Black 'The Eighteenth Century British Press: Problems and Perspectives' in *ibids.* (eds.) *Politics and the Press in Hanoverian Britain* (Lewiston, 1989), vii - xxi, and Lucyle Werkmeister *A Newspaper History of England 1792 - 1793* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1967), esp. pp. 19 - 44, 163 - 179 and 488 - 491. The most useful recent work is the chapter entitled 'The right-wing press from Jacobitism to the Reform crisis: a discussion of the sources' in James J. Sack *From Jacobite to Conservative. Reaction and orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760 - 1832* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 8 - 29.

³ Asquith, 'The structure, ownership and control of the press', pp. 100 - 101; Olivia Smith *The Politics of Language 1791 - 1819* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 159 - 160. I. R. Christie argues in *Myth and Reality* p. 324 that even this did not necessarily lead to substantial increases in circulation.

greatest growth took place in the number and circulation of daily evening and Sunday newspapers,⁴ two of which, *The Observer* and *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, have been used in this study. There were also changes in the geographical nature of the press. The numbers of provincial newspapers published tripled in the period between 1782 and 1830,⁵ the most significant feature being increases in the numbers of periodicals published rather than in individual circulations.⁶ The 'growth' of the press in this period was primarily one of choice and variety of individual titles, not in circulation figures.

The production and distribution of newspapers was dominated by commercial rather than political concerns. Editors were relatively free from overt political influence because of an increasing revenue base.⁷ Active government influence does not seem to have been a significant factor, although there were of course many subtle ways of exerting pressure. This relative independence seems to have been because of a lack of personal initiative by politicians: Foxite Whig efforts to influence the press during the years examined in this study were subdued, and did not revive until the return of a Pitt ministry in 1804.⁸

Commercial considerations, then, were the most significant factor influencing the production of a newspaper, and of these, advertising was essential.⁹ Little is known about the relationship between the conductors of

⁴ Asquith, 'The structure, ownership and control of the press', p. 99. See also Asquith, 'Advertising and the Press', p. 703, p. 715, and Christie, *Myth and Reality*, p. 314.

⁵ Asquith, 'The structure, ownership and control of the press', pp. 99.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 100; Christie, *Myth and Reality*, p. 323.

⁷ Asquith, 'Advertising and the Press', p. 721; Christie, *Myth and Reality*, pp. 328 - 329, although Werkmeister sees the opposition press in the 1790s as existing only because of Pitt's unpopularity: *A Newspaper History of England*, pp. 21 - 22.

⁸ Asquith, 'The Whig Party and the Press', pp. 266 - 268.

newspapers and their customers, although advertisers were aware of their interests in the case of a newspaper in decline.¹⁰ The need to sustain revenue through advertising was essential even to newspapers which have been identified strongly with particular political interests. James Perry juggled advertising revenue in the *Morning Chronicle* with an expressed commitment to political reporting through regular and detailed publication of parliamentary proceedings. Perry was prepared to sacrifice advertising revenue for political coverage, although probably only because he could afford to do so because of increased revenue from the advertising he did print.¹¹ Although relative financial independence through advertising signalled a liberation from direct government influence, it could also make a newspaper owner hesitate to offend his customers, particularly in provincial communities.¹²

Modern as these concerns may seem, the student of the early nineteenth-century press should not assume that the relationship between proprietors and advertisers was the same as that of today. Ivon Asquith has argued that there does not seem to have been any significant relationship between general economic conditions and the profits made from advertising. Advertisers may have increased their patronage during times of economic decline to drum up more business, while staples of advertising such as servants and books seem to have been unaffected by fluctuating economic conditions.¹³

⁹ Harris and Lee, 'Introduction', p. 19; Asquith, 'Advertising and the Press', pp. 704 - 705, and Christie, *Myth and Reality*, pp. 326 - 327.

¹⁰ Asquith, 'Advertising and the Press', p. 708.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 720.

¹² Asquith, 'The structure, ownership and control of the press', pp. 113 - 114.

¹³ Asquith, 'Advertising and the Press', p. 711.

While political considerations were not the most significant feature of the production and distribution of newspapers, the same cannot be assumed of their consumption. Most papers were regarded as having some political affiliations or sympathies. *The Times* was widely regarded as being a ministerial paper, although its fortunes were on the decline in the 1790s.¹⁴ The proprietors, the Walter family, had Pittite connections and received a ministerial pension of some £300 per annum between 1789 and 1799.¹⁵ Another cluster were known as the opposition newspapers, because of their broad political sympathies with the fortunes of the opposition Whigs gathered around Charles James Fox. The two prominent papers in this group were the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Morning Post*. Perry's *Morning Chronicle* acquired the reputation of being a vehicle for the Foxite Whigs, although as the previous paragraph suggests, the relationship was rather more complicated.¹⁶ The fluctuating fortunes of the party did affect the newspaper's sales, however, suggesting the existence of a link between the fortunes of a newspaper and the politicians it was believed to support.¹⁷ The evening and Sunday newspapers do not seem to have acquired the same reputations, possibly because they were recent arrivals. *The Observer* had been founded in 1791, five years before the issues examined in this study and without a history of pre-Revolutionary sympathies,¹⁸ while *Bell's Weekly Messenger* only commenced publication in May 1796.

¹⁴ *The History of 'The Times'. "The Thunderer" in the making, 1785 - 1841* (London, 1935), p. 35, pp. 75 - 76; John Ashton *The Dawn of the XIXth Century in England. A social sketch of the times* (London: 5th edition, 1906) p. 380.

¹⁵ *The History of 'The Times'*, pp. 60 - 61.

¹⁶ Aspinall, *Politics and the Press*, pp. 281 - 282; G. A. Cranfield *The Press and Society From Caxton to Northcliffe* (London and New York, 1978), p. 79.

¹⁷ Asquith, 'Advertising and the Press', p. 709.

¹⁸ Aspinall, *Politics and the Press*, pp. 83 - 85.

Although newspapers might have specialised in certain aspects of advertising and news reporting, and might have been identified in the public mind with certain parties or political figures, to remain a profit-making business they had to maintain a general appeal through as wide a circulation as possible.¹⁹ The trade connection between the London booksellers and provincial cities was vital in this process.²⁰ Newspapers were distributed also through the free government post, newspaper carriers and newsagents.²¹ The time of year was also a significant factor in the circulation of a periodical. Direct sales were much greater during the parliamentary session and the London social season.²²

The numbers sold were not high by modern standards. But historians are now recognising that there was a considerable secondary circulation not reflected in direct sales figures.²³ Town dwellers, in particular, had wide access to newspapers when they wanted them.²⁴ As well as the coffee and gin houses of London, most provincial towns had reading rooms where newspapers were taken

¹⁹ Asquith, 'Advertising and the Press', p. 709; Asquith, 'The structure, ownership and control of the press', p. 107; Peters, 'Historians and the Eighteenth-Century English Press', p. 43, and Christie, *Myth and Reality*, p. 327.

²⁰ Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, p. 84.

²¹ Donald Read *Press and People 1790 - 1850. Opinion in three English cities* (London, 1961), pp. 65 - 66.

²² Asquith, 'Advertising and the Press', p. 709; Harris and Lee 'Introduction', p. 20, and Brewer, *Party ideology*, p. 143. *The Times* sold fewer copies during the summer period between May and September: *The History of 'The Times'*, pp. 38 - 39.

²³ Asquith, 'The structure, ownership and control of the press', pp. 100 - 101; Asquith, 'The Whig Party and the Press', p. 265; Peters, 'Historians and the Eighteenth-Century English Press', p. 38; Harris and Lee, 'Introduction', pp. 22 - 23; Brewer, *Party ideology*, pp. 148 - 152; Peters, *Pitt and Popularity*, p. 20; Smith, *The Politics of Language*, pp. 160 - 161.

²⁴ Aspinall, 'The circulation of newspapers in the early nineteenth century', pp. 29, 35; Christie, *Myth and Reality*, pp. 324 - 325. For the development of urban culture in the eighteenth century, see Peter Borsay *The English Urban Renaissance. Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660 - 1770* (Oxford, 1989) and Borsay 'All the town's a stage: urban ritual and ceremony 1660 - 1800' in Peter Clark (ed.) *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns 1600 - 1800* (London, 1984), pp. 228 - 258.

on subscription. Reading societies and mechanics' institutes existed in the manufacturing cities, and pamphlets were often read at radical meetings in the immediate post-war period.²⁵ Access to newspapers might also have come about through group purchasing, sharing, or theft.²⁶ Although legislation was passed against the lending of newspapers in 1789 it seems to have remained a widespread practice, particularly between London and the provinces.²⁷

The centrality of London to the majority of the points outlined above stands out. London was the British metropolis, the closest urban centre to the Continent, the centre of trade and politics and the focus of the annual social season. It was therefore the area in which the opportunities for operating a newspaper as a successful business venture were at their greatest in the early nineteenth century. Many of the practices discussed in the preceding paragraph probably also occurred in the smaller towns. But there are good reasons to remain cautious about the social penetration of the press in the provincial towns which are now being recognised as a crucial feature of the generation of economic and social growth in contemporary Britain.²⁸ The exact nature of the clientele of the coffee and gin houses of these towns remains unclear, but it seems that the greater proportion were not from the lower classes until the reduction of costs in the

²⁵ Aspinall, 'The circulation of newspapers in the early nineteenth century', p. 33 - 34.

²⁶ Harris and Lee, 'Introduction', pp. 22 - 23; also Read, *Press and People*, pp. 201 - 202.

²⁷ Aspinall, 'The circulation of newspapers in the early nineteenth century', p. 42; Asquith, 'The structure, ownership and control of the press', p. 100. Copies of *The Times* were often lent at a penny a copy, and these were later sent into the country: Oliver Woods and James Bishop *The Story of The Times. Bicentenary Edition 1785 - 1985* (London, 1983; second edition, 1985), p. 27.

²⁸ Borsay (ed.) *The Eighteenth-Century Town*; Borsay, 'All the town's a stage'; P.J. Corfield *The Impact of English Towns 1700 - 1800* (Oxford, 1982); Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb *The Birth of a Consumer Society. The Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England* (London, 1982).

stamp duty in the 1830s.²⁹ It was the middle parts of society which had the most consistent access to newspapers, magazines and pamphlets.³⁰

There is also some evidence to suggest that the lower sorts did not want literary material. Recent research by Patricia Anderson suggests that although the press did penetrate deeply into British society in the early nineteenth century, the demand from the lower sorts was primarily for pictorial rather than literary material. These included the cheaper prints, woodcuts and broadsheets.³¹ Despite this, it would be shortsighted to claim that they were not consumers of the literary publications. Town dwellers would have been constantly exposed to print culture through contact with posters on tavern walls, street hawkers, peddlers, and with the voluntary societies which were a significant feature of urban existence in this period.³²

This study uses only one of the provincial newspapers which were burgeoning in this era, so their nature and influence will be considered in a more cursory fashion than the London periodicals have been. Provincial newspapers were usually owned and edited by the same person or group of people, which was not always the case in London.³³ Much has been made of the innovative nature of political reporting in provincial papers in this period, particularly in the *Leeds Mercury*,³⁴ which is used in this study. Cookson cites this paper as one of those

²⁹ Aspinall, 'The circulation of newspapers in the early nineteenth century', p. 36.

³⁰ Patricia Anderson *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture 1790 - 1860* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 18 - 19.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 21, pp. 44 - 45.

³² R. J. Morris 'Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780 - 1850: an analysis', *The Historical Journal* 26, 1, 1983, pp. 95 - 118.

³³ Harris and Lee, 'Introduction', p. 19. For one aspect of the provincial press, see M. J. Murphy 'Newspapers and opinion in Cambridge, 1780 - 1850', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 6, 1972, pp. 35 - 55 and his *Cambridge Newspapers and Opinion 1780 - 1850* (Cambridge, 1977).

which promoted liberal sentiment, in particular a sympathy for the broad aims of the French Revolution. He plays down the originality thesis by identifying a renewed 'scissors and paste technique', whereby news and opinions were still reproduced largely from the London newspapers: 'far safer in the circumstances and hardly less effective than any statement of editorial views.'³⁵ The relationship between the provincial papers and those sent into the country from London is an issue which needs further investigation by historians, although Donald Read has claimed that London newspapers were read as supplements and were not a serious threat to their provincial counterparts.³⁶

The nature of circulation in rural areas has received less attention than that in the towns. The opportunities for secondary circulation on the same scale would seem to have been very limited. Yet it appears that ways were found by least some sellers and eager readers to have access to the newspapers. Aspinall claims that in rural Scotland, a single copy of one newspaper would be shared between many different farms within a parish.³⁷ While this is an example of the lengths some Britons would go for access to printed information, logically rural areas should be regarded as the weaker links in a chain of circulation which extended across England and Scotland, but was strongest in London and the provincial towns.

The deficiency of evidence about the generation and distribution of occasional publications has already been touched upon. There has been no full-

³⁴ Read, *Press and People*, p. 77; Christie, *Myth and Reality*, p. 326; Asquith, 'The structure, ownership and control of the press', pp. 105 - 106.

³⁵ Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, p. 134 (quotation). For the *Leeds Mercury* as promoter of liberal views, see p. 103, 111 - 113.

³⁶ Read, *Press and People*, p. 203.

³⁷ Aspinall, 'The circulation of newspapers in the early nineteenth century', p. 35, citing from M. E. Craig *The Scottish Periodical Press 1750 - 1789*, p. 18.

length publication on the subject, merely chapters and references in monographs on related topics. These provide limited but useful indications about the impact of the pamphlets in particular. One recent study of conservative politics has claimed that:

there may have been a diminution in the importance of pamphlet literature as a gauge of public or elite opinion in the second half of the eighteenth century... [several historians] all perceive during that period a movement away from pamphlets to newspapers or magazines as *the* important vehicles of communication by print,³⁸

but further research is needed to substantiate this generalisation. Cookson's study of the Friends of Peace reveals some valuable information about the publication and distribution of these ephemera,³⁹ but the question of the numbers published is not addressed. In the 1760s, the average edition for a pamphlet was about 500, rising to 1 000 or 1 500 for the most successful.⁴⁰ Given that the newspapers were not increasing in circulation in the late eighteenth century, it is reasonable to assume that the circulation of occasional ephemera followed the same pattern. Limited knowledge about the volume and distribution of the pamphlets and printed sermons is not, however, a complete barrier to generalisation about their influence. Occasional publications received attention through the reviews, and extracts were often printed or referred to in newspapers.⁴¹ Nor should the durable nature of the opinions expressed in the pamphlets be overlooked. Their function as vehicles for the expression of the opinions of the writer makes it probable that they had more influence on their

³⁸ Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative*, p. 131.

³⁹ Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, pp. 84 - 114, 131 - 132.

⁴⁰ Brewer, *Party ideology*, p. 146.

⁴¹ Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, pp. 131 - 132; Brewer, *Party ideology*, pp. 146 - 147.

readers' views that the newspapers, which seem to have been read mainly for their news content.⁴²

The final category of sources used in this study is the magazines and the reviews, which were conceived for and sold primarily to landowners, the clergy, urban professionals and the commercial élite. These publications also had a significant secondary circulation through such avenues as lending libraries, universities, and educational societies.⁴³ They had a wide influence among the literary men of the day and among booksellers; the latter often promoted their wares on the basis of a favourable review.⁴⁴ Because they were at the more expensive end of the market, the magazines and reviews probably did not have the same degree of social penetration as the newspapers. A significant liberal subtext has been identified in the magazines and reviews used in this study. Because of their exclusion from the mainstream of political discourse, these publications were ideal vehicles for the expression of liberal opinions.⁴⁵

There are strong reasons for not subscribing to older ideas about the nature of the writers and publishers of these works. The image of the scribbling, semi-literate hack has been replaced with a hazy picture of men of some literary merit, for whom reviewing was not their most significant form of income. The poet Southey, for example, was a contributor to the *Critical* between 1797 and 1804.⁴⁶ Publishers have been reconsidered in the same light. Derek Roper argues against the picture of corrupt booksellers promoting their own wares in

⁴² Asquith, 'The Whig Party and the Press', pp. 281 - 282.

⁴³ Derek Roper *Reviewing before the 'Edinburgh', 1788 - 1802* (London, 1978), pp. 24 - 25.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴⁵ Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, pp. 85 - 91, p. 132.

⁴⁶ Roper, *Reviewing before the 'Edinburgh'*, p. 21, pp. 30 - 31.

reviews, claiming that 'the usual pattern was for a bookseller to own only a share of the concern and leave its editing to other men, who might also be part-owners.' Ralph Griffiths ceased to sell books once the *Monthly Review* was a going concern.⁴⁷ Favouritism towards books with which the review was associated would have been noticeable to readers and critics, because of the practice of including the names of the publisher and author in the details of the review.⁴⁸

Having considered the relationship between the press and society and looked in some detail at the three major categories of sources used in this study, it is now time to consider the most pressing question in the use of these sources to construct historical generalisations. To what degree can they be taken as evidence of 'views' or 'opinion' about British views of Napoleon Bonaparte? Virginia Berridge has explored the question of the relationship between historical research and the use of newspapers in depth.⁴⁹ She points out that analysis which relies solely on the expression of editorial opinion implies that 'such editorial content adequately represents the opinion of individual readers and that changes in editorial opinion are linked to shifts in readership attitudes.'⁵⁰ Using content analysis the writer makes generalisations about topics of importance based on the frequency of certain themes. These are then used as evidence of 'views' or 'public opinion', the frequency of certain topics or subjects being assumed to have indicated relevance to both the writer and the reader.⁵¹ Berridge suggests that the researcher should consider all aspects of newspaper content and

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 31 - 32.

⁴⁹ Virginia Berridge 'Content Analysis and Historical Research on Newspapers' in Michael Harris and Alan Lee (eds.) *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries* (London and Cranbury, N.J., 1986), pp. 201 - 218, esp. pp. 201 - 207. The question is also considered in Asquith, 'The Whig Party and the Press', pp. 280 - 281.

⁵⁰ Berridge, 'Content Analysis and Historical Research on Newspapers', p. 201.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 201 - 202.

production when attempting to construct generalisations about historical topics. Rather than simply the expressions of editorial opinion, this should include the nature of the generation and production of the periodical, and all its content, including news and advertisements.⁵²

With these comments in mind, this study has approached its selection of newspapers and considered the news and advertisements as well as the leader columns, while also attempting to gather as much information as possible on the background to the particular newspaper. Berridge's recommendations have been especially useful for a study which has needed to examine news reports and comments in detail to assess the significance, or otherwise, of certain issues at certain points. But while her comments about the dangers of shallow content analysis are salutary, it would be unproductive to argue that editorial opinion is not by implication evidence of some broader views which can be regarded as public opinion. Its very existence indicates that readers were willing to accept some expanded interpretation of the disparate news items contained within the pages of a single issue. And while newspapers, magazines and pamphlets need to be used with caution, it cannot be denied that they offer the greatest degree of insight into public opinion about historical questions.

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⁵² *ibid.*, p. 205.

CHAPTER ONE

Bonaparte as revolutionary general: Italy, 1796 - 8.

Historians have been reluctant to consider British views of Bonaparte's campaign against the Austrians in Italy as a period worthy of examination in its own right. The definitive work, MacCunn's *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, devotes a very hurried four pages to the eighteen months between the summer of 1796 and the winter of 1797 - 8, and some of the evidence from which his conclusions are drawn is taken from outside the period.¹ Wheeler and Broadley's study does not examine the period in any detail, because of their attempt to link British views of Bonaparte exclusively with invasion,² while Stella Cottrell's eschewal of event-based narrative in favour of analytical experimentation takes her even further away from what is needed: a close examination of the themes and concerns which dominated British opinion in this period.³

This chapter sets out firmly to examine British views of Bonaparte at a time when, as Wheeler and Broadley state perceptively at one point, 'the aftermath of the French Revolution still exercised an appreciable influence in English politics'.⁴ It argues that recognition of the persistence of revolutionism as a major feature of the British world view of the latter 1790s is the key to

¹ MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, pp. 9 - 13.

² Wheeler and Broadley, *Napoleon and the Invasion of England*, vol. I, xii.

³ Cottrell's aims and methodology are explored in detail in the Introduction. I should like to make clear that my objection is not with Cottrell's methods *per se* (indeed, I believe her study to be a laudable attempt), simply that I believe them to have taken her in the opposite direction to the treatment the subject needs.

⁴ Wheeler and Broadley, *Napoleon and the Invasion of England*, vol. I, p. 195. Unfortunately, the authors' focus on invasion threats does not allow them to pursue this valuable line of argument further.

understanding perceptions of Bonaparte, whom they regarded as a leading figure in the expansion of revolutionary ideologies throughout Europe.

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Napoleon Bonaparte first came to the attention of the British public as one of the most successful of the French generals campaigning in Europe in the summer and autumn of 1796.⁵ He was portrayed as a young, energetic and profoundly republican general leading French troops against the Austrians in Italy. General Bonaparte was a significant figure during the following year because his military and organisational successes were noted.⁶ His progress was charted through the publication of letters he sent to the Directory, subsequently printed in French newspapers; his battles were related and titbits of gossip associated with this latest republican novelty were recounted.⁷

The degree of approbation accorded to Bonaparte depended on the nature of the magazine or newspaper. Of some interest was the relationship between the general and his troops. An article in *The Aberdeen Magazine* by Scots improver, statistical writer and luminary Sir John Sinclair is a useful example. Sinclair claimed that Bonaparte was 'abstemious in living' and 'ardent beyond every thing for military glory, and full of the most anxious zeal to rival the heroes commemorated by Plutarch, whose works he is perpetually perusing.'⁸ The

⁵ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 1 May 1, 1796; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 2 May 8, 1796; *The Times* 3616 Monday June 20, 1796; *The Times* 3625 Thursday June 30, 1796; *The Aberdeen Magazine* for June 1796, p. 98; *The Aberdeen Magazine* for September 1796, p. 203; *The Aberdeen Magazine* for October 1796, p. 254; *The Times* 3725 Thursday October 27, 1796.

⁶ For example *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 12 July 17, 1796, pp. 91 - 92; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 19 September 4, 1796, p. 146; *The Times* 3725 Thursday October 27, 1796.

⁷ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 2 May 8, 1796, p. 14; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 5 May 29, 1796, p. 38; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 6 June 5, 1796, p. 45; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 8 June 19, 1796, p. 58; *The Observer* 269 February 5, 1797.

loyalty of Bonaparte's troops to his person was especially noted. The French forces were described as being bound to succeed because of their enthusiasm for their cause and the alternate terror and adoration they felt for their commander. This cast Bonaparte in the role of leader of the Revolution's military energies.⁹

Others were less generous in their estimation. *The Times* was particularly scathing about the use of words such as 'liberty' and 'freedom' in French revolutionary discourse, and used satirical language to ape revolutionary proclamations. In one of his first appearances in this newspaper Bonaparte was described as having extended his role of the 'emancipator of the Italians from the yoke of slavery and despotism' to the bells in Milan, and having 'freed the "sonorous bell-metal" from the constant and savage oppression of the "lead hammer of time"'.¹⁰ This anecdote uses the catchwords 'friend to liberty' and 'rights of humanity', phrases used to signify French enthusiasms, and the entire tale is presented in the tone used by *The Times* to ridicule what it regarded as the ideological excesses of the Revolution. This undertone is evident in the majority of the paper's commentary on Bonaparte's activities in Italy. The report which noted that Bonaparte had proclaimed friendship between Venice and Republican France, promising that the 'religion, property, government and customs should be respected', would surely have prompted the intended cynical response from readers conversant with the opinions of a newspaper which persistently condemned the Revolution and its expansionist consequences.¹¹

⁸ Sir John Sinclair 'Characters of Archduke Charles and General Buonaparte', *The Aberdeen Magazine* for July 1797, p. 330.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

¹⁰ *The Times* 3625 Thursday June 30, 1796. It is worth noting that Bonaparte did not appear as frequently in *The Times* in this period as he did in other newspapers.

¹¹ *The Times* 3616 Monday June 20, 1796. For the anti-revolutionary sentiments of *The Times*, see *The History of The Times*, pp. 63 - 65.

This study has found little direct evidence that British views of Bonaparte were conceived in traditional francophobic terms. This is not to suggest that British ideas about revolutionism were not shaped indirectly by the decades of francophobic sentiment which have been argued to have permeated British existence.¹² But the content of reporting and commentary about Bonaparte during the Italian campaign was determined by concerns about the expansion of the Revolution beyond French national borders. The campaign was primarily an ideological rather than a military one; and although opinions about Bonaparte shifted constantly in response to events, they remained firmly within a revolutionary conceptual model.

It quickly becomes obvious from reading the newspapers and magazines of this period that Bonaparte was not regarded as a monster-like figure, and neither were accounts published of sadistic behaviour or brutalities. Rather there was an emphasis on Bonaparte's humanity in comparison with the horde of revolutionary soldiers he commanded.¹³ One of the first references to Bonaparte in *Bell's Weekly Messenger* was the story that he had thrown himself among his soldiers to stop their carnage at the camp of the Piedmontese.¹⁴ It is significant that the emphasis is on the revolutionary general having to prevent the rapacity of his own troops. An identifiable layer of humanity was added to Bonaparte in stories of this kind, while an identifiable target for disdain and fear, the base republican soldier, was maintained. Bonaparte was also identified with genuine acts of humanity which were not related directly to military matters. His freeing of Frenchmen such as La Fayette from Austrian prisons was noted with approval,

¹² Michael Duffy ' "The noisie, Empty, Flutt'ring French": English images of the French, 1689 - 1815', *History Today* 32, 1982, pp. 21 - 26; Gerald Newman 'Anti-French propaganda and British liberal nationalism in the early nineteenth century: suggestions towards a general interpretation', *Victorian Studies* 18, 1975, pp. 385 - 418.

¹³ Something stated explicitly in *The Aberdeen Magazine* for July 1797, p. 331.

¹⁴ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 5 May 29, 1796, p. 38.

although the initiative was accorded to his political masters rather than to Bonaparte himself.¹⁵

The commentary on the French occupation of Italy after the initial campaign demonstrates further that Bonaparte was conceived primarily as a revolutionary figure. Implicit in this was recognition that revolutionary generals were also representatives of the French government. In this role Bonaparte was recognised as being deeply involved in creating republican states,¹⁶ and in negotiating the peace of Campo Formio between France and Austria in the autumn of 1797.¹⁷ During the delicate negotiations with the Pope in early 1797 Bonaparte was described as the vehicle of Directorial policy, although it was recognised that the practicalities of distance meant that he had considerable room for personal initiative.¹⁸ The tone of an article in *The Aberdeen Magazine* suggests that Bonaparte was expected to follow the general policies set down by his political superiors, but that this allowed room for manoeuvre on smaller details.¹⁹

Bonaparte was lauded for accommodating practical concern and politeness with republican intent; his dealings with the Pope were regarded as imposing hard conditions, but were acknowledged to have been conducted in respectful terms.²⁰ He was portrayed as being gracious when in a position of strength; *The Annual Register* pointed to a letter to his opponent, the Archduke Charles, which

¹⁵ *The Annual Register* for 1798, p. 108.

¹⁶ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 42 February 12, 1797, p. 329; *The Times* 3894 Monday May 15, 1797; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 59 June 11, 1797, p. 465.

¹⁷ *The Times* 4033 Monday November 6, 1797; *The Observer* 310 November 12, 1797.

¹⁸ *The Observer* 275 March 12, 1797.

¹⁹ 'Anecdotes of Pius VI', *The Aberdeen Magazine* for September 1798, pp. 437 - 441.

²⁰ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 46 March 12, 1797, p. 364; *The Annual Register* for 1797, p. 10; see also *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 71 September 3, 1797, p. 562.

supposedly stated that enough men had died, and that it was time to begin peace negotiations. This was described as 'a nobler monument than any of his victories.' Bonaparte's military talents, recognised as being used for the promotion of republican ideologies, could be appreciated publicly because he was seen to be seeking a peace settlement with equal determination. After all, as the narrative continued, his letter 'breathes the sentiments of a gallant military chief; and, at the same time, the subtlest sentiments of morality'.²¹ Another long passage stated that by accepting an armistice while in a superior military position, Bonaparte had displayed moderation and good judgement, and expressed admiration for his military talents.²² Narratives such as these give the lie to the simplistic implication that he was regarded as a bloodthirsty figure from his first appearances in British public consciousness.

Some pains were taken in liberal magazines to point out that Bonaparte was observing the liberties of person and property during the Italian occupation. *The Annual Register* stressed the influence of Bonaparte's personal character in determining this moderation, claiming that he 'fought on all occasions to adopt measures of lenity'.²³ The general's primary aim was regarded as being the transmission of republican ideologies to the Italian people. Little doubt was expressed about the fervency of Bonaparte's personal convictions; indeed, he was seen as a favourite of republicans at home because of his successful propagation of republicanism in Italy.²⁴ The care taken to play down the military nature of the occupation, and the consideration apparently shown to the Italians, were seen as evidence of that, the republican cause was more important to Bonaparte

²¹ *The Annual Register* for 1797, p. 32 (both quotations).

²² *ibid.*, pp. 33, 34. Similar sentiments were expressed in *The Observer* 317 January 7, 1798.

²³ *The Annual Register* for 1797, p. 19.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 62.

personally than simple military conquest. It was related that by his politeness and good manners Bonaparte cultivated popularity and acquired as great an influence as he would have done through repressive military occupation.²⁵ He was believed to be preparing the Italians for republican government by cultivating leading families, as well as encouraging young Italian men to take up the republican cause.²⁶ But recognition that Bonaparte could take harsh action where required illustrates an awareness of the repressive possibilities of what was also a military occupation. The closing of political clubs in Milan was noted as being consistent with his desire to tolerate no opposition to republican ideologies.²⁷ Perhaps the relatively favourable reputation Bonaparte enjoyed in many British publications in this period was because no significant risings occurred in the territories he governed. Had Bonaparte needed to exercise military and political repression to a greater extent than he did, opinion about him might have been rather different.

At this point it is useful to reflect on what Bonaparte might have represented on a wider scale, specifically his contribution to British conceptions of the revolutionary general as a rank. Bonaparte was regarded as a model of how a revolutionary general could conduct a highly successful military campaign, make converts to republicanism, and negotiate with legitimate authorities in seemingly good faith.²⁸ His proficiency in finance and the manipulation of public opinion was also noted. *The Annual Register* stated rather pointedly that 'No general, no politician of the present day, appears to be more profoundly skilled than that leader in the management of the two great springs that move the whole

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 22 - 23; mentioned also in *The Annual Register* for 1798, p. 108.

²⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 108 - 109.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 107.

machinery of public affairs, the passions and finance.²⁹ The apparently contradictory picture of a revolutionary general who seemed to respect property, but who also demanded much of the territories he was occupying for ideological reasons, seems to have been one which commentators were happy to accept. Perhaps this was because although Bonaparte's demands on Italian resources were noted, so too was his determination that his troops should respect private property. From these comments we can see that the British conception of the rank of revolutionary general was that of a figure in whom military skill and ideological conviction were combined with finesse at the management of occupied territories.

British awareness of Bonaparte's ethnic origin is another issue which requires consideration. Curiosity about this³⁰ opened out into questioning about whether any conflict existed between his Italian ancestry and his ideological allegiances. Bonaparte's propagation of republicanism among the Italian people was perceived by some commentators to rely on a cultivation of ethnic kinship. He was described as being a hero to the Italians, despite his position as the head of a French army of occupation. *The Aberdeen Magazine* claimed that they regarded him 'in the light of a countryman, who has revived the ancient military glory of Italy.' Bonaparte's decisive defeats of the Austrians were believed to have made him popular.³¹ Despite recognition of this acclaim, British commentators had little conception of any conflict between divided loyalties. Rather, they argued that Bonaparte was trying to balance allegiance to both his 'countrymen' and to republicanism through making moderation and restraint the key features of the French occupation.³² Awareness of Bonaparte's ethnic origin was used to explain

²⁹ *The Annual Register* for 1797, p. 34.

³⁰ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 50 April 9, 1797, p. 397, responded to a case made by C. F. Volney for Bonaparte being an American.

³¹ *The Aberdeen Magazine* for July 1797, pp. 330 - 331.

how he played down to the Italians the occupation of their country by foreigners. *Bell's Weekly Messenger* claimed that when announcing his decision to merge the Cisalpine and Transpadane Republics in July 1797, Bonaparte had told the National Guards at Como that the Italian people would not be subjected to rule by foreigners.³³ Bonaparte's popularity with the Italians was argued by Sir John Sinclair to have made him indispensable to the Directors, even though they disliked his independent spirit.³⁴ His ethnic origin, then, was a distinct feature of the discourse on Bonaparte's occupation of Italy. But it was not seen as the source of any conflict with his revolutionary convictions; instead it was regarded as an aspect of his person which he was manipulating to further the revolutionary cause.

The previous paragraph has indicated that the British were aware that there was some friction between Bonaparte and his political superiors. But his intimate political relationship with one of the leading figures ruling France was also recognised. *The Annual Register* claimed that Bonaparte had informed his army on 4 July 1796 that there was a counter-revolutionary movement abroad. The magazine related that the general had asked his men 'to second him in all the measures he might propose for the service of *his* party'.³⁵ This referred to his widely-acknowledged political relationship with Director Paul Barras. Bonaparte, like others of his rank, found it necessary to maintain a presence in the muddled waters of French domestic politics. His career was linked intimately to the influence of his patron. British newspapers and magazines saw it as one of mutual benefit: Bonaparte was dependent on the opportunities Barras could

³² *The Annual Register* for 1797, p. 15, pp. 22 - 23.

³³ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 65 July 23, 1797, p. 514.

³⁴ *The Aberdeen Magazine* for July 1797, p. 331; see also *The Aberdeen Magazine* for August 1797, pp. 415 - 416.

³⁵ *The Annual Register* for 1797, p. 62. The emphasis is mine.

provide for him, while the latter was perceived to be building his career on his client's military successes.³⁶ *The Aberdeen Magazine* predicted another change of regime in France in late 1797, based on its estimation that Barras could rely on Bonaparte's control of the Army of Italy for support,³⁷ while *The Times* and *The Observer* speculated that Bonaparte would be appointed Generalissimo of the French forces when Barras achieved pre-eminence within the Directory.³⁸

Rather than being regarded as a man with a consuming desire for personal power,³⁹ Bonaparte was believed to be attempting to entrench himself in Italy as a bargaining point in his relationship with his political superiors. Rumours that he was considering assuming sovereignty over Italy were linked to awareness that French politicians were not always generous in their treatment of successful generals returning home from spreading revolutionary ideologies abroad. *The Times* claimed in July 1797 that Bonaparte had been reprimanded officially by the Legislature for his independence, and that he was concerned about the likely effect of this censure on his career prospects. The newspaper speculated that Bonaparte might use his position of strength in Italy to bargain for greater responsibility.⁴⁰ It seems clear, then, that conceptions of Bonaparte's politics in this period were limited in scope to recognition of his relationship with Barras and to a belief that he was attempting to ensure that he would have a future when he was recalled from Italy.

³⁶ *The Observer* 316 December 31, 1797; *The Aberdeen Magazine* for December 1797, p. 614; *The Times* 4112 Tuesday February 6, 1798; *The Times* 4126 Thursday February 22, 1798.

³⁷ *The Aberdeen Magazine* for December 1797, p. 620.

³⁸ *The Times* 4112 Tuesday February 6, 1798; *The Observer* 326 March 11, 1798.

³⁹ Ashton, *The Dawn of the XIXth Century in England*, p. 2; Wheeler and Broadley, *Napoleon and the Invasion of England*, vol. I, p. 88.

⁴⁰ *The Times* 3945 Thursday July 13, 1797; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 85 December 10, 1797, p. 677.

The final section of this chapter deals with the question of Bonaparte's relative significance in British eyes between the summer of 1796 and the winter of 1797 - 8. MacCunn has claimed that Bonaparte was initially a relatively unimportant figure in comparison with other generals, who were campaigning in what was regarded as a more strategically important area in Germany.⁴¹ This study has assessed the amount of space devoted to coverage of Bonaparte and Italy when compared with other news and commentary as a test of this generalisation.⁴² It posits that Bonaparte's successes in the Italian campaign and his role in negotiation with the Pope and the creation of republican regimes rendered him a figure of some newsworthiness, but agrees with MacCunn that he was also simply one among many of his rank.⁴³

Some reconsideration of the ways in which the British perceived the war in Europe is probably necessary to elaborate upon this. Although in terms of strategy events in Italy in 1796 were important because Bonaparte's opponents, the Austrians, were Britain's major ally, they do not seem to have been singled out for special mention. *Bell's Weekly Messenger* devoted as much attention to the campaigns conducted by Generals Moreau and Jourdan in Germany as on Bonaparte and Italy in July 1796.⁴⁴ The 'History of Europe' section of *The Annual Register* for 1797 analysed the Italian campaign and its strategic significance, but it was not singled out noticeably when compared with narratives of campaigns in other areas.⁴⁵ It seems that the press were less interested in strategy than might be expected.

⁴¹ MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, p. 9.

⁴² The method followed was that advocated by Berridge and outlined in 'The sources: The press, society and public opinion in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries' above.

⁴³ An aspect emphasised in *The Observer* 266 January 15, 1797; *The Observer* 272 February 19, 1797.

⁴⁴ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 12 July 17, 1796, pp. 91 - 92.

Other events would probably have crowded out awareness of Bonaparte's occupation of Italy during 1797. The subjects devoted most coverage during the middle months of the year were domestic: the British naval mutinies at Spithead and the Nore, and the resulting trials of the mutineers.⁴⁶ The Pitt ministry was negotiating for peace with the Directory, and the parlous state of French domestic politics seems also to have overshadowed Bonaparte and Italy.⁴⁷ Probably the best conception of Bonaparte's relative significance is one linked to the state of the war. He would have been regarded as important when events with which he was associated, such as the battles in the summer and autumn of 1796 or the peace conferences to which he contributed in 1797, were major news. But Bonaparte had little intrinsic significance, and there were no assumptions that he was predestined for greater things. He was simply one among many generals in 1796 - 7, and British commentators looked to events to assess whether or not General Bonaparte would disappear from the Revolutionary conflict as suddenly as he had appeared. In late 1797 the first rumours were beginning to emerge of Bonaparte's involvement in a new project of more direct relevance to Britons.

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⁴⁵ *The Annual Register* for 1797, pp. 1 - 17.

⁴⁶ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 61 June 25, 1797, pp. 485 - 487; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 63 July 9, 1797, pp. 501 - 502.

⁴⁷ *The Observer* 291 July 2, 1797.

The eighteen months Napoleon Bonaparte spent in Italy between the summer of 1796 and the winter of 1797 - 8 are critical to understanding his British reputation over the following six years. Bonaparte was not perceived to be an inhuman figure, rather, as MacCunn has acknowledged, military success and occupation were seen as vehicles for the promotion of French republican ideologies. British newspapers and magazines believed that Bonaparte was a revolutionary by personal belief as much as by rank. While this earned him ridicule from some quarters, he was depicted in others as an example of how a revolutionary general could combine a fervent personal belief in the republican cause with civilised behaviour. Awareness that Bonaparte was an Italian did little to alter recognition that he was a revolutionary. Rather, he was perceived to be using his ethnic origins to further his ideological aims. Although the Italian campaign was important because Bonaparte's opponents were Britain's allies, this does not seem to have prompted British newspapers and magazines to concentrate upon him in any greater detail than they did his fellow generals. Intrinsic significance was not a characteristic of British views of Bonaparte from 1796 - 8.

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CHAPTER TWO

Bonaparte as roving revolutionary: the Egyptian expedition, 1798 - 9.

The historical literature of British views of the Egyptian expedition has centred on stories of massacres, and has depicted Bonaparte as scheming throughout his desert sojourn to gain political power by abandoning his troops.¹ MacCunn identifies the Egyptian expedition as important for commentators because it allowed them to depict Bonaparte as 'a typical Oriental conqueror, hypocritically embracing Mohammedanism, displaying the most odious tyranny, barbarity and callousness, finally baffled by the honest bravery of a few British soldiers under Sir Sidney Smith'.² This is the definitive existing statement on the subject, and it is also a good example of the most significant fault of the historical literature. It refers as much to the long-term consequences of the expedition for British views of Bonaparte as it does to the beliefs expressed in 1798 - 9. MacCunn's account fails to distinguish clearly between contemporary ideas and those of later years, and therefore fails to establish clear statements about the relative importance of accounts of cruelty during the period of the expedition itself.³

Stella Cottrell states that stories about deliberate attempts by Bonaparte to murder or desert his soldiers during the Egyptian expedition were the most off-

¹ This outline is, of course, a crude sketch of the more sophisticated arguments presented by the respective works; but it is in my reading a fair estimation of the general model proposed. See Ashton, *The Dawn of the XIXth Century in England*; Wheeler and Broadley, *Napoleon and the Invasion of England*. Cookson, although more perceptive than the other studies, still subscribes to this model: *The Friends of Peace*, p. 171.

² MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, p. 17.

³ *ibid.*, pp. 14 - 17.

commented upon factors about the man.⁴ Her conclusions are flawed in a similar fashion to those of MacCunn. Cottrell's statement that Bonaparte's massacre of his own soldiers was the most important feature of the expedition in British eyes is based exclusively on evidence generated by the resumption of war and invasion crisis of 1803. This chapter cannot either dispute or support Cottrell's contentions, precisely because they fall outside the immediate period of British response to the expedition. There are scattered indications in Cottrell's narrative about the years to which she refers; but her inconsistent use of evidence contributes little to any re-assessment of the arguments in the older literature.⁵ This chapter will examine British views of Bonaparte during the Egyptian expedition through the reporting and commentary which formed the immediate response, arguing that revolutionism rather than inhumanity was the dominant theme.

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Over the winter of 1797 - 8, it was widely believed that Bonaparte would be in command of an attempt to invade Great Britain in the following spring.⁶ Activity on the northern French coast was taken as evidence of preparations for such an attempt, and was accompanied by rumours that Bonaparte was familiarising himself with the roads between Dover and London.⁷ This was not a universal belief; *The Times* argued in January that the French had no such

⁴ Cottrell, 'English views of France and the French', pp. 232 - 233.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 238 - 239.

⁶ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 83 November 26, 1797, p. 658, 680; *The Observer* 316 December 31, 1797; *Express and Evening Chronicle* 521 Thursday 18 - Saturday 20 January 1798; *Lloyd's Evening Post and British Chronicle* 6318 Wednesday 21 February - Friday 23 February 1798, p. 188; *The Aberdeen Magazine* for March 1798, p. 148; *Express and Evening Chronicle* 539 Tuesday 6 March - Thursday 8 March 1798 and *Express and Evening Chronicle* 552 Thursday 12 April - Saturday 14 April 1798.

⁷ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 91 January 21, 1798, p. 20, 22; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 103 April 15, 1798, p. 113.

plans.⁸ Nonetheless, for the first few months of 1798, Bonaparte was regarded as the revolutionary general most threatening to the security of Great Britain. By the spring newspapers were aware that French naval energies were now being expended at Toulon on the southern coast, where a large fleet was being assembled. These preparations were reported with an understandable degree of trepidation; much of the discussion in these months speculated that the Toulon fleet was connected with the rumours about a projected invasion of Great Britain.⁹

A close examination of newspapers in the spring and summer of 1798 reveals that there was anything but agreement about the probable destination of the expedition. Egypt seems to have been one of the last places considered; as well as the continuing possibility of an assault on Great Britain, the establishment of a revolutionary republic in eastern Europe was suggested.¹⁰ Reports that Bonaparte was going to Egypt were ridiculed by *Bell's Weekly Messenger* in April 1798, which suspected that Naples was the true destination: 'We sincerely hope, however, that our Readers... treat with the contempt it deserves, the idea of their sending their ablest Generals and their best troops into Egypt, upon a speculative and romantic adventure.'¹¹ The same newspaper stated in June that the Toulon ships would probably join the Mediterranean divisions of the French and Spanish fleets for a greater purpose,¹² while *The Times* did not decide that Egypt was a

⁸ *The Times* 4088 Tuesday January 9, 1798.

⁹ For example *The Times* 4184 Tuesday May 1, 1798.

¹⁰ *Express and Evening Chronicle* 577 Saturday 16 June - Tuesday 19 June 1798; for confusion about where the expedition is bound, see also *The Aberdeen Magazine* for June 1798, p. 304; *Lloyd's Evening Post* 6372 Friday 29 June - Monday 2 July 1798, p. 7; *The Times* 4210 Thursday May 31, 1798; *The Times* 4204 [sic] Thursday June 14, 1798. MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, p. 13, recognises this point.

¹¹ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 105 April 29, 1798, p. 133.

¹² *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 111 June 10, 1798, p. 181; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 113 June 24, 1798, pp. 197 - 198.

possible destination until it had passed by Italy, and it was still predicting Greece as a likely destination four days before the arrival of news of the landing in Egypt.¹³ The initial reporting of the expedition can best be summed up, then, as confused. By August, however, newspapers relayed accounts of the the landing at Alexandria,¹⁴ and were filled with reports of the battle in August between Bonaparte's fleet and the British Mediterranean fleet commanded by Nelson, which resulted in the stranding of the French expedition in Egypt.¹⁵

Insufficient attention has been paid to British belief in the explicitly revolutionary intent of the Egyptian expedition. MacCunn acknowledges that Bonaparte was seen as a revolutionary figure going on a 'Republican crusade', but he too does not establish the centrality of this issue for contemporaries.¹⁶ If contemporary newspapers were initially uncertain about the exact destination of the expedition, there was little uncertainty about its broad intentions. It was characterised consistently as a republican venture, an attempt to take revolutionary ideologies to foreign lands. News about the Egyptian expedition was constantly couched in terms which suggested to readers that it was a republican folly, another manifestation of the excesses the French had developed as a consequence of the Revolution. One newspaper commented that the French wanted to take the Pyramids and place them in Paris: such, it was implied, was their plundering enthusiasm.¹⁷

¹³ *The Times* 4226 Tuesday July 10, 1798; for the report of Greece as the destination, see *The Times* 4263 Thursday August 23, 1798.

¹⁴ *The Observer* 349 August 26, 1798; *The Times* 4266 Monday August 27, 1798; *The Observer* 352 September 16, 1798; *The Times* 4285 Tuesday September 18, 1798; *The Times* 4290 Monday September 24, 1798.

¹⁵ *The Times* 4297 Tuesday October 2, 1798; *The Observer* 355 October 7, 1798; *The Times* 4302 Monday October 8, 1798; *The Times* 4304 Wednesday October 10, 1798 and *The Times* 4309 Tuesday October 16, 1798.

¹⁶ MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, pp. 13 - 15.

¹⁷ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 107 May 13, 1798, p. 150.

The news that Bonaparte had personally planted a tree of liberty among the cedars of Lebanon was reported satirically in the *Morning Post* in May 1799. The incident was treated in the same disparaging fashion as republican pretensions in Europe. It was implied that the majesty and longevity of the cedars of Lebanon, reaching back to Biblical times, were worth much more than the empty gesture of planting a French tree of liberty.¹⁸ The content of contemporary newspapers occasionally also provides fascinating insights into the ways in which the wider community regarded the expedition. *Bell's Weekly Messenger* reported the wording of a toast raised in Weymouth in the autumn of 1798: ' "May the Plagues of Egypt shake hands with the Army of Buonaparte; may the Floods of the Nile kiss their lips; and may the Crocodiles give them the Fraternal Embrace." '19 The ideological codes associated with French republicanism are clearly illustrated in statements such as this one, with its use of such telling textual signposts as 'Fraternal Embrace'.

Awareness of revolutionary intention was supplemented by speculation about the possible strategic aims of the expedition. Muriel Chamberlain argues that the Egyptian expedition was seen as an attempt by the French to re-establish their influence in India,²⁰ and this was certainly one feature of contemporary commentary. The magazines and reviews in particular claimed that one of the expedition's aims was to cut off British access to India through the Mediterranean.²¹ Recognition that the expedition was a strategic threat to British

¹⁸ *Morning Post* 9471 Wednesday May 15, 1799.

¹⁹ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 129 October 14, 1798, p. 325.

²⁰ Muriel E. Chamberlain 'Pax Britannica?' *British Foreign Policy 1789 - 1914* (London, 1988), p. 30.

²¹ *The Annual Register* for 1798, pp. 134 - 135; review of Eyles Erwin *An Enquiry into the Feasibility of the supposed Expedition of Buonaparte to the East* in *Gentleman's Magazine* for April 1799, pp. 322 - 335. MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of*

interests was strengthened by appreciation of Bonaparte's military talents. The review of the pamphlet *An Enquiry into the Feasability of the supposed Expedition of Buonaparte to the East* in the *Critical Review* questioned whether Bonaparte would be content with the establishment of a French republican settlement in Egypt, or whether the prospect of destroying British influence in India would prove too great a lure.²²

The India issue faded quickly from the newspapers after the summer of 1798, although it lingered in the magazines.²³ This was probably because the news of Bonaparte's difficulties in Egypt made the prospect of his crossing the desert to threaten British possessions in India seem increasingly unlikely. The promotion of republican ideologies was always believed to be more important than strategic aims, anyway; the expedition was to be one of intellectual rather than military conquest.²⁴ *The Annual Register* speculated that Bonaparte was to spread republicanism throughout eastern Europe, being given a wide 'theatre of action', that he was inciting revolt of the peoples of the East against their Turkish masters, and that the 'ardent and aspiring genius of Buonaparte' was opening the area up successfully to republican influence.²⁵ Although strategic concerns played their part in British opinions about Bonaparte's role in the Egyptian expedition, its primary motivation was always conceived as that of intellectual colonisation.

Napoleon, p. 14 - 15, recognises this, but his use of evidence from between 1798 and 1806 stretches the credibility of his generalisations.

²² Review of Eyles Erwin *An Enquiry into the Feasability of the supposed Expedition of Buonaparte to the East* in *Critical Review* 25, 1799, p. 335.

²³ *The Observer* 363 December 2, 1798 claims that Bonaparte has given up any plan to invade India; review of Erwin, *An Enquiry into the Feasability of the supposed Expedition...* in *Critical Review* 25, 1799, p. 335.

²⁴ *The Times* 4542 Thursday July 25, 1799.

²⁵ *The Annual Register* for 1798, pp. 135 - 139 (quotation p. 135).

The origins of the expedition were attributed almost universally to the Directors themselves. The author of the pamphlet *Egypt Delivered; or, the Conqueror Conquered* claimed that he would examine 'the wild schemes of the ambitious Directory of France, which they employed this adventurous General to execute'.²⁶ Opinions about the exact relationship between Bonaparte and his superiors were less uniform. *The Times* claimed on several occasions that the expedition had been set in motion because the Directors could not satisfy the financial and political demands of the recently-returned Italian campaigners. It described the expedition as 'an excellent expedient for quieting the present clamour',²⁷ and claimed that the French government were hoping that Bonaparte would take his troops to far-off Egypt and never return.²⁸ But even *The Times*, the newspaper most consistently hostile to Bonaparte, did not claim that he was in collusion with the Directors over this objective. The assumption was that Bonaparte had accepted command of the expedition because of ambition and a personal belief in the expansion of the Revolution, rather than to deliberately abandon or murder his troops.

Other newspapers also speculated that Bonaparte was a pawn in the machinations of his political masters. The *Morning Post* argued that he was being sent to Egypt because he had been too successful in Europe. It claimed that the Directors were about to renounce territorial expansion as a trade-off in peace negotiations; the Egyptian expedition had been created 'not for sending him to make conquests, but for sending him where he could not make conquests; for sacrificing the best officers and troops on a ridiculous enterprise while they

²⁶ *Egypt Delivered; or, the Conqueror Conquered*, pp. 2 - 3; see also *The Times* 4354 Tuesday December 11, 1798; *Morning Chronicle* 9426 Wednesday August 7, 1799.

²⁷ *The Times* 4534 Tuesday December 11, 1798; *The Times* 4359 Monday December 17, 1798.

²⁸ *The Times* 4534 Tuesday December 11, 1798.

were wanted to make conquests in Europe.' Bonaparte would not support the renunciation of territories which he had played a major role in conquering both ideologically and militarily, it was implied, and it was recognition of this which had inspired the Directors to appoint him to command of an expedition to the East.²⁹ This thesis was not the only one in circulation. The *Morning Post* reported in February 1799 that the Directors were attempting to reinforce the expedition with more men and fresh supplies. Failing that, they were trying to find a way to bring Bonaparte back to the war effort in Europe.³⁰ But this was definitely a minority view; the majority of the press believed that Bonaparte and his troops were victims of the schemes of French politicians. There was no belief that he was personally conspiring to abandon or destroy his troops.³¹

Cynicism about Bonaparte's religious beliefs is another strong indication of the primacy of revolutionism in contemporary British awareness of the Egyptian expedition. The news of Bonaparte's religious accommodations with the natives which filtered into the British press from the autumn of 1798 linked him further with the apostatical tendencies of the Revolution. Many newspapers commented on Bonaparte's apparent conversion to Islam, undertaken apparently to facilitate his dealings with the natives. *The Times* questioned coyly whether Bonaparte's attachment to the religious customs of 'the Musselmen' was sufficient for him to undergo circumcision.³² Statements about Bonaparte and religion during the Egyptian expedition should be regarded as further examples of how the revolutionary French were seen to be manipulating religion for ideological purposes. They should not be conflated with condemnations made in later years, nor with the sentiments expressed in the millenarian publications

²⁹ *Morning Post* 9554 Tuesday August 20, 1799.

³⁰ *Morning Post* 9406 Thursday February 28, 1799.

³¹ See the works cited in n. 1 above.

³² *The Times* 4321 Thursday November 1, 1798.

which flourished after the resumption of war in 1803. And the tone of the comments about Bonaparte's revolutionary agnosticism in the expeditionary period are wry, or satirical, rather than harshly judgemental. There were references to Bonaparte's having turned native in religious terms; but at most they seem to have been attacks on what was regarded as the recantation of European civilisation.³³

There were, of course, attempts by clerics to locate Bonaparte in a religious context. His relationship with the religious state of the French as a revolutionary nation was discussed at one of the meetings of the Eclectic Society in November 1798. This group of ministers, drawn from both the established Church and the Dissenting denominations, met fortnightly at St. John's Chapel in London to discuss topics of religious and political significance.³⁴ The subject of their November meeting was 'What is the best way of improving the next Thanksgiving Day', inspired almost certainly by the celebrations commemorating Nelson's victory at the Nile. The discussion dwelt on the French rejection of legitimate religion. The Reverend J. Venn, founder of the society and Rector of Clapham, stated in his contribution: 'So long as God is thus openly acknowledged by us, and despised or defied by our enemies, we may hope that 'He will withdraw his hand, and work for his name's sake, that it should not be polluted in the sight of the heathen'.³⁵ Nelson's victory was described by the Reverend H. Foster as divinely inspired. Foster contrasted the declarations made in the letters of the opposing commanders, stating that while Nelson ascribed his victory to the glory of God, Bonaparte blamed his defeat on the destinies, the implication being that

³³ For example, *Morning Post* 9452 Tuesday April 23, 1799.

³⁴ John H. Pratt (ed.) *The Thought of the Evangelical Leaders. Notes of the Discussions of the Eclectic Society, London during the years 1798 - 1814* (Edinburgh, 1856, reprinted 1978), pp. 1 - 3.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 86.

Bonaparte believed his god to be fortune.³⁶ The sentiments expressed at this meeting suggest that contemporary clerical discourse also regarded Bonaparte as part of the French revolutionary rejection of God and established religion practices.

The British emphasis on the ideological nature of Bonaparte's role in the expedition is demonstrated further by the reporting of the cultural and scientific activities undertaken by the French in Egypt. In the liberal journals particularly, some space was devoted to pointing out the efforts being made to contribute to European knowledge of the region. The readers of the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *Reviews* were presented with a great deal of information suggesting that the expedition was concerned with both fostering the transmission of republicanism, and with conducting cultural and scientific projects.

Naturally the emphasis given to cultural activities differed according to the sympathies of the particular publication. Although *The Observer* noted not unfavourably details of bridge-building, the repair of canals and the construction of highways undertaken by the French troops,³⁷ other newspapers were less impressed. *The Times* commented that although it was aware that Bonaparte had undoubted talents in these areas, even these would not be able to extricate him from his predicament in Egypt.³⁸ What is especially interesting is the extent to which Bonaparte was believed to be personally involved in the organisation of chemical, geographical and mineralogical projects.³⁹ Some commentators recognised that there was probably an element of self-

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *The Observer* 363 December 2, 1798; *The Observer* 382 April 21, 1799.

³⁸ *The Times* 4299 Thursday October 4, 1798.

³⁹ *The Observer* 382 April 21, 1799.

justification in this behaviour. One writer in *The Annual Register* claimed that Bonaparte was cultivating 'the republic of science and knowledge' because 'he appears to have been equally anxious to approve of his conduct on the whole, as either to the French nation, or the rulers of the French democracy'. It is significant that Bonaparte is here emphasised as wishing to impress on others the genuineness of his republican credentials.⁴⁰ Commentators also believed that Bonaparte's military talents were contributing to the fulfilment of the cultural intentions of the expedition. *The Annual Register* claimed expansively:

In fine, it may be observed of Buonaparte, and it is, perhaps, what most happily distinguishes his character, that there never was any general, ancient or modern, if we ought not to accept Alexander the Great, who so happily united the progress of arms with the advancement of science.

Rather than a condemnation of Bonaparte as a despotic, oriental figure, this comment signals approval of his using his military skills for the gathering of knowledge.⁴¹ It is clear, then, that the British were aware that the Egyptian expedition was more than just a military exercise; alongside its ideological intentions, its attempts at contributing to the sum of European knowledge about the region was also acknowledged. This is a rather more sophisticated picture of the subject than that suggested by historians.

Emphasising the primacy of a revolutionary conception is not to claim that the press was unaware of the casualties of the expedition. The deaths of French soldiers under Bonaparte's command in a far off country was certainly acknowledged. There was a distinctly condemnatory undertone to the story that many of the bodies found after the siege at Acre had certificates of good conduct

⁴⁰ *The Annual Register* for 1799, p. 46. See also *The Observer* 365 December 16, 1798 and *The Observer* 382 April 21, 1799.

⁴¹ *The Annual Register* for 1799, pp. 46 - 47.

from the Italian campaign in their pockets.⁴² But the credence given to such stories depended very much on the sympathies of the particular publication. The narrative of the Battle of Aboukir in the *Morning Chronicle* in October 1799 claimed that Bonaparte planned the assault carefully and that he was 'anxious to spare the effusion of his soldiers' blood'.⁴³ And criticism of deaths among the French forces should not be conflated with accusations of despotism or tyranny in a political sense which occurred following Bonaparte's assumption of domestic power.

This chapter has so far argued that in British eyes, the Egyptian expedition was fundamentally an ideological rather than a military enterprise. The conception of the venture was ascribed to the Directors, and Bonaparte's command was attributed to his personal belief in the need for revolutionary expansion as much as to his military abilities. Scientific and cultural investigation were acknowledged features of the expedition intent, and Bonaparte was again associated with this personally. It is now appropriate to consider a possible conceptual model which takes all of these issues into account. The model offered here is that of Bonaparte as a roving revolutionary general, derived from a comment made by J. Steven Watson. Referring to opinions about Bonaparte in the aftermath of his defeat at the Nile, Watson argues: 'Thereafter though Napoleon might remain master of Lower Egypt, he did so not as a general of a great power but as the isolated captain of a roving and self-contained army of adventurers.'⁴⁴ Such a conception is valuable, because it takes into account contemporary recognition that the expedition was a republican enterprise commanded by a military figure. That Bonaparte was regarded as an ideological

⁴² *Morning Post* 9537 Wednesday July 31, 1799.

⁴³ *Morning Chronicle* 9492 Thursday October 24, 1799.

⁴⁴ J. Steven Watson *The Reign of George III. 1760 - 1815* (Oxford, 1960), pp. 378 - 379.

warrior is illustrated nicely by a comment made by *Bell's Weekly Messenger* when reporting news of the Toulon fleet's attack on Malta in June 1798. Bonaparte is presented as 'That worthy General of a Republic, which began by renouncing all conquest, but which seems inclined to subjugate the whole earth, has attacked another neutral state.' One reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* described Bonaparte in July 1799 as 'an active and intrepid leader of a horde of Cossacks.'⁴⁵ In the reporting and commentary of this period, then, Bonaparte was depicted as the roving revolutionary commander, the man to whom the transmission of republican ideologies in the East had been entrusted.

The value of this model is illustrated further by contemporary awareness of Bonaparte's potential mortality. The sporadic and fragmented nature of news reaching Great Britain about the Egyptian expedition has not been sufficiently emphasised. In June and July 1799 it was reported that Bonaparte was besieging the castle of St. John d'Acre near Jaffa, and that he was surrounded by hostile armies commanded by Turks and the British Sir Sidney Smith, but such detail was comparatively rare.⁴⁶ When considered on a day-to-day basis the picture is one of uncertainty about Bonaparte's actions and whereabouts. The reading public would have noted the sporadic reports of inconclusive skirmishing, and these must have led many to doubt whether Bonaparte would return.⁴⁷ *The Observer* of

⁴⁵ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 115 July 8, 1798, p. 212; review of *Copies of original Letters from the Army of General Buonaparte in Egypt, intercepted by the Fleet under the Command of Admiral Lord Nelson; with an English Translation* in *Gentleman's Magazine* for July 1799, p. 414.

⁴⁶ *Morning Post* 9505 Monday June 24, 1799; *Morning Chronicle* 9389 Wednesday June 26, 1799; *Morning Chronicle* 9394 Tuesday July 2, 1799; *Morning Post* 9512 Tuesday 2 July, 1799; *The Times* 4535 Monday July 15, 1799; *Morning Chronicle* 9412 Wednesday July 24, 1799; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 170 July 28, 1799, p. 237. See also *The Observer* 404 September 15, 1799.

⁴⁷ Implicit in all the reports relating to the expedition, but see especially *The Observer* 347 August 12, 1798; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 121 August 19, 1798, p. 257: 'Equal uncertainty prevails concerning the issue of the negotiation at Rastadt, and BUONAPARTE's expedition.'; also *The Aberdeen Magazine* for August 1798, p. 415; *The Observer* 352 September 16, 1798; *The Observer* 362 November 25, 1798; *The*

21 October 1798 noted that insurance policies had been opened returning twenty guineas upon receipt of an initial five should Bonaparte return to France.⁴⁸ Awareness of Bonaparte's mortality was also fuelled by periodic rumours of his capture and death.⁴⁹ One of the most significant stories of early 1799 was the assassination of Bonaparte during a meeting of native notables he had called in Cairo. The reason given was that he had been attempting to force republican symbols and customs on the participants.⁵⁰ Recognition that British newspapers were aware of Bonaparte's failures and his potential mortality goes a considerable way towards discrediting the idea that he was seen as scheming to return to France and to political power. Britons were more concerned with whether or not Bonaparte would survive his time in the desert.

Another important question has remained relatively unconsidered. How significant was news and commentary about Bonaparte and the Egyptian expedition in relation to news about the war in Europe? J. E. Cookson has commented that with the news of the Egyptian expedition 'the British public came to regard him as a man of gigantic ambition and grandiose schemes'.⁵¹ It seems more likely that once the initial excitement over the British victory at the Nile had died down, Bonaparte and the expedition receded from public consciousness. The coverage accorded the expedition relative to the reporting and commentary about the war in Europe suggests that Bonaparte and the Egyptian expedition came

Observer 365 December 16, 1798; *The Times* 4359 Monday December 17, 1798; *The Aberdeen Magazine* for December 1798, p. 617.

⁴⁸ *The Observer* 357 October 21, 1798.

⁴⁹ *The Observer* 365 December 16, 1798; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 141 January 6, 1799, p. 5; *The Times* 4359 Monday December 17, 1798; *The Aberdeen Magazine* for December 1798, p. 617; *The Observer* 366 December 23, 1798; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 168 July 14, 1799, p. 221.

⁵⁰ *The Observer* 370 January 20, 1799; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 143 January 20, 1799, pp. 21; *Morning Chronicle* 9303 Monday March 18, 1799.

⁵¹ Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, p. 171.

to be regarded as an interesting curiosity. The content of newspapers in the summer of 1798 suggests that other events were probably more significant than the departure of the Toulon expedition. As well as devoting much space to parliamentary proceedings,⁵² newspapers in May and June were filled with reports of the rebellion in Ireland and the state trials of the rebels at Maidstone.⁵³ The capture of Malta in June, and reports of the Battle of the Nile which filtered into Britain from September were covered in some detail.⁵⁴ But even these events were surrounded by uncertainty: news of the engagement between Nelson and Bonaparte at the Nile was dismissed by at least one newspaper as just another rumour of Bonaparte's complete destruction.⁵⁵ As the previous paragraph has indicated, reporting of Bonaparte's activities was sporadic in the year following the news of the landing in Egypt.⁵⁶ The activities of French generals on the continent, judged to be more relevant to the state of the war, were accorded greater priority; more attention was paid to Bernadotte than to Bonaparte.⁵⁷

The situation was not appreciably different in 1799. The progress of the war in Europe and the parliamentary debates over the Union with Ireland

⁵² *The Times* 4160 Tuesday April 3, 1798; *The Times* 4162 Thursday April 5, 1798.

⁵³ *The Times* 4174 Thursday April 19, 1798; *The Times* 4177 Monday April 23, 1798; *The Times* 4203 Wednesday May 23, 1798; *Lloyd's Evening Post* 6356 Wednesday 23 May - Friday 25 May 1798; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 111 June 10, 1798, p. 177; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 117 July 22, 1798, pp. 226 - 227.

⁵⁴ *The Times* 4219 Monday July 2, 1798; *The Observer* 342 July 8, 1798 (Malta); for the Nile, see *The Times* 4297 Tuesday October 2, 1798; *The Observer* 355 October 7, 1798; *The Times* 4302 Monday October 8, 1798; *The Times* 4304 Wednesday October 10, 1798; *The Times* 4309 Tuesday October 16, 1798; *The Times* 4324 Monday November 5, 1798. See also John Ashton *English Caricature and Satire on Napoleon I* (London and New York, 1888; reissued 1968), p. 52.

⁵⁵ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 123 September 2, 1798, p. 276.

⁵⁶ *The Observer* 359 November 18, 1798; *The Observer* 370 January 20, 1799; *The Observer* 382 April 21, 1799. For an indication that there was often little news available, see *The Times* 4438 Thursday March 21, 1799.

⁵⁷ *The Times* 4184 Tuesday May 1, 1798.

dominated the newspapers in the early months.⁵⁸ In March *Bell's Weekly Messenger* devoted more attention to the French invasion of Switzerland and the campaign between the armies of General Jourdan and the Archduke of Austria than to the Egyptian expedition.⁵⁹ In July the *Morning Post* concentrated on the contest in Europe between Generals Suvarov and Moreau.⁶⁰ This relative indifference cannot be explained simply by a lack of news. Little attention was paid to Bonaparte and the Egyptian expedition because the renewed Anglo-Austrian offensive against the French in Europe was seen as of greater significance to the direction of the war.⁶¹ The British public may also have begun to lose interest in Bonaparte and Egypt. As early as August 1798, *The Times* claimed that the public were tired of hearing about the Toulon fleet.⁶² The *Morning Chronicle* hinted at public disinterest in October 1799 when it stated:

BUONAPARTE's fate seems to be a matter in which the public are at present very little inclined to interest themselves. Now and then his death or resurrection may be called in to afford a breathing time, but as little attended to as the *music* between the *acts*!⁶³

⁵⁸ *Morning Chronicle* 9255 Monday January 21, 1799, in which the coverage of the expedition to Egypt is present but the main focus of the news coverage is relations between the Emperor and the King of Prussia; *Morning Post* 9380 Tuesday January 29, 1799; *Morning Post* 9399 Wednesday February 20, 1799; *Morning Chronicle* 9329 Wednesday April 17, 1799; *Morning Post* 9452 Tuesday April 23, 1799. *The Times'* political coverage was dominated by parliamentary proceedings in the first few months of 1799: *The Times* 4389 Thursday January 22, 1799; *The Times* 4408 Wednesday February 13, 1799 and *The Times* 4441 Monday March 25, 1799.

⁵⁹ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 151 March 17, 1799, p. 85; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 164 June 16, 1799, p. 188 (Switzerland); *The Times* 4441 Monday March 25, 1799; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 153 March 31, 1799, p. 101 and *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 155 April 14, 1799, p. 117 (Jourdan and the Archduke).

⁶⁰ *Morning Post* 9517 Monday July 8, 1799.

⁶¹ A point made by *Morning Post* 9466 Thursday May 9, 1799.

⁶² *The Times* 4249 Tuesday August 7, 1798.

⁶³ *Morning Chronicle* 9483 Monday October 14, 1799.

Had Bonaparte assumed a greater degree of significance at this time than this narrative is suggesting, more attention would have been paid to it. This would have manifested itself not merely in the news reporting, which was subject to availability, but particularly in the leaders which offered extended commentary on the news items.

The Egyptian expedition was an especially significant opportunity for the drawing of historical parallels. Kathryn Moore Heleniak has suggested that many comparisons were made between France under Louis XIV and France under Napoleon Bonaparte, and that Marlborough's victories against the French in the early eighteenth century were referred to extensively in the early years of the nineteenth.⁶⁴ Parallels between Bonaparte and historical figures were certainly drawn in the years 1798 - 9. They were, however, taken more usually from the classical than the modern era. A comparison was made between Bonaparte and Scipio setting sail for the destruction of Carthage with the departure of the Toulon fleet in the spring of 1798.⁶⁵ Reference was also made to Alexander, though it seems to have referred to a great military hero who aimed to spread Greek civilisation into Asia, rather than to the cultivation of despotic tendencies.⁶⁶ *The Annual Register* pointed out that although Bonaparte's constant championing of republican government made him popular with many of the French people, others felt threatened by his influence within the army. He was reported as being seen by some Frenchmen as a possible Caesar.⁶⁷ The classical allusion would not have been lost on British readers. It signalled the danger of successful generals to civilian governments:

⁶⁴ Kathryn Moore Heleniak 'Old Kaspar: Pictorial Pacifism in the Napoleonic Period', *The Art Bulletin* 72, 1, March 1990, p. 110. I am grateful to Dr. J. E. Cookson for this reference.

⁶⁵ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 105 April 29, 1798, p. 135.

⁶⁶ *Morning Post* 9358 Thursday January 3, 1799.

⁶⁷ *The Annual Register* for 1798, pp. 110 - 111.

An interesting letter appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for July 1799. Calling himself 'Sica', the writer stated that he intended to enquire into Bonaparte's reputation as a general, and investigate 'the justness of his pretensions to such a rank'.⁶⁸ Although Sica acknowledged that Bonaparte possessed great courage, demonstrated by his behaviour during the Italian campaign, he qualified this by stating that Bonaparte lacked other qualities including restraint and coolness of judgement. This writer's conclusions are especially interesting as a snapshot of opinion about Bonaparte in the final months of the expedition. When summing up his beliefs about why Bonaparte was in Egypt, he returned to a revolutionary model, claiming that Bonaparte's means of conquest have been primarily not those of military power but of 'Jacobinism'.⁶⁹

Revolutionist arguments in the summer of 1799 lead to the question: how much had British views of Napoleon Bonaparte changed as a result of his command of the Egyptian expedition? The answer seems to be very little. Perhaps the most significant development was the introduction of the theme of the manipulation of religion for political ends. Sica claimed that part of the reason behind Bonaparte's success had been his

insinuating accommodation to popular prejudices in religion, so notoriously manifested in his letters to the Pope, his declaration of Mahometanism, and, long before this time, his acceptance of the Jewish faith; these, all these, have principally concurred in putting this man in possession of many countries, where the credulity, want of energy, or treachery, of the natives have made them false to their own interests.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Letter dated 8 July in *Gentleman's Magazine* for July 1799, pp. 568 - 569.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 569.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 568.

In other ways, aside from new anecdotes with which to characterise Bonaparte as a revolutionary figure, this chapter has demonstrated that there was little conceptual change. Bonaparte was still a 'Jacobin' employing ideological trickery and his military abilities to pursue republican aims. The historian should be rightly wary about taking a single account as evidence of general opinion. But that an obviously literate and informed man could contribute a lengthy epistle to the *Gentleman's Magazine* about Bonaparte without mentioning domestic political ambitions, massacres or the poisoning of troops suggests strongly that these themes have been inaccurately located in this period.

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Informed readers would have been aware of Bonaparte's triumphant return through France to Paris in October 1799, as newspapers reproduced accounts of this in some detail.⁷¹ A sense of expectation can be detected in these reports. There was speculation about where Bonaparte would be deployed next, and indications that relations between the Directory and the returning general were sensitive.⁷² The *Morning Post* discounted a rumour that Bonaparte was to be sent against Portugal, claiming that 'so great a man will not be despatched on so small an object.'⁷³ But in the autumn of 1799 British newspapers had no awareness that any major upheaval was about to occur; as late as September, one paper could publish an article about French politics entitled 'On the present state of French principles' without mentioning Bonaparte.⁷⁴ The general's return did not

⁷¹ *Morning Chronicle* 9490 Tuesday October 22, 1799; *Morning Post* 9708 Wednesday October 23, 1799; *Morning Chronicle* 9497 Wednesday October 30, 1799; *Morning Post* 9715 Thursday October 31, 1799; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 184 November 3, 1799, p. 345.

⁷² *Morning Chronicle* 9502 Tuesday November 5, 1799.

⁷³ *Morning Post* 9725 Tuesday November 12, 1799.

⁷⁴ *Morning Post* 9568 Thursday September 5, 1799.

even dominate news coverage: considerable attention was paid to the conflict in the Low Countries. In late October *The Observer* was more interested in the campaign of the Duke of York in Holland than in the return of Bonaparte.⁷⁵ In November 1799 Napoleon Bonaparte was still regarded as a republican general, and little more. That there was a sense of expectation about what might come next cannot be denied. But it would be unjustifiably Whiggish to claim that British newspapers displayed any kind of awareness of what was to come.

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⁷⁵ *The Observer* 409 October 20 1799; see also *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 178 September 22, 1799; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 180 October 6, 1799; *Morning Post* 9701 Tuesday October 15, 1799.

CHAPTER THREE

Bonaparte as revolutionary ruler: from the coup of *Brumaire* to the summer of 1800.

In mid-November 1799 British newspapers learned that a change of government had taken place several days earlier in France. On the evening of 9 November (18 *Brumaire* in the revolutionary calendar) Napoleon Bonaparte had participated in a military coup, leading troops into the Chamber of the Five Hundred and being wounded slightly in the fracas. It emerged that Bonaparte had been left in a position of authority and well able to take advantage of the circumstances that had placed him there. The Directory had been dissolved and a tripartite regime instituted, with Bonaparte as First among three consuls. News of *Brumaire* naturally stimulated a great deal of discussion in British newspapers in the following six months, with Bonaparte's new role as revolutionary ruler drawing him to the attention of the British public on an unprecedented scale. Debate about the direction of the Revolution and the prospect of an end to the Revolutionary war now focused on the new First Consul and the stability of his regime.

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The question of who was behind the coup was the most important issue in the immediate reporting of the events of *Brumaire*. Historians have either, like Ashton, emphasised British concern that Bonaparte had overthrown the Directory upon his own initiative and that the general had enthroned himself,¹ or have not examined the question in any detail. The issue was an intriguing one for

¹ 'He arrived, dissolved the Council of Five Hundred, and the Triumvirate consisting of himself, Cambaceres and Le Brun was formed': Ashton, *The Dawn of the XIXth Century in England*, p. 2.

contemporaries. The majority of newspaper opinion believed that former Director the abbé Siéyès had been the prime conspirator, and that Bonaparte had been in charge of the military reinforcement of the constitutional overthrow. Siéyès was believed to be reasserting his former influence as the architect of successive French constitutions through *Brumaire*.² Commentators were aware that the coup had been planned while Bonaparte had been in Egypt, and that Bonaparte had not been the first choice of the conspirators. *The Observer* claimed that although General Moreau had been the figure initially settled upon to command the military side of the coup, the popular reception accorded to Bonaparte upon his return to France had forced the plotters to make him the vehicle of their ambitions.³

The issue was complicated further by the spectre of the wily French politician Paul Barras, a leading member of the Directory to whom Bonaparte had known political links. The *Morning Post* argued that Barras and Siéyès had been the driving force behind the coup, and that Bonaparte had been their willing aide in securing the loyalty of the armed forces. The newspaper speculated that rather than intending to place Bonaparte in power, the coup had been planned instead to prevent the democratic republicans from gaining influence within the Directory.⁴ *The Times*, too, argued that the coup had gone much further than its architects had intended. It claimed that Barras had planned on becoming *primus inter pares* within the Directory, and had intended to rule indirectly, rather than attracting the opprobrium of direct rule.⁵ Barras, rather than Bonaparte, was meant to be the main beneficiary of *Brumaire*. The minor role initially

² *The Times* 4644 Wednesday November 20, 1799; *Morning Chronicle* 9540 Thursday December 19, 1799.

³ *The Observer* 416 December 8, 1799.

⁴ *Morning Post* 9730 Monday November 18, 1799.

⁵ *The Times* 4644 Wednesday November 20, 1799.

ascribed to the latter is instructive. Bonaparte was seen as the agent of the Barras faction. His criticism of Barras before the Council of the Ancients and his general condemnation of the Directors were apparently to convince others of the honest and genuine nature of his intentions.⁶ It is clear that the initial British reaction to the coup located Bonaparte as the willing tool of the leading political figures. It was believed that his new position of power and authority had been achieved inadvertently rather than through concerted scheming.

Fortuitous opportunism thus characterised the initial British view of Bonaparte's participation in *Brumaire*. Commentators then began to speculate about what would happen next, their indecision nicely illustrating the absence of any anticipation of Bonaparte's new role. The *Morning Chronicle* claimed: 'it is too much to suppose that men have always acted upon a systematic plan when they have achieved a grand object. BUONAPARTE himself, therefore, in all probability has not settled, even in his own mind, what he is to do.'⁷ In the weeks following *Brumaire* British newspapers wondered about the direction events would take. It was entirely possible that Bonaparte might himself be replaced by one of the more experienced political figures. Would Si  y  s reassert his influence over the general who had been elevated, perhaps temporarily, to a position of great influence and authority? Or would Bonaparte assert himself against those who had conspired to subvert the existing regime and who were responsible for his new position?

Newspapers conveyed the uneasy relationship between Bonaparte and Si  y  s to their readers.⁸ The new First Consul was depicted as attempting to

⁶ *Morning Post* 9731 Tuesday November 19, 1799.

⁷ *Morning Chronicle* 9514 Tuesday November 19, 1799.

⁸ *The Times* 4642 Monday November 18, 1799; *Morning Chronicle* 9513 Monday November 18, 1799.

assert an authority of his own by freeing himself of Siéyès' influence. (Barras had disappeared from reporting by this point.) 'The Public are apprized of the part [Bonaparte] espoused, and the immediate consequences,' *The Observer* commented, 'but they are yet to learn that he revolts at a state of tutelage attempted to be imposed upon him, and objects to parts of the System submitted by the great Manufacturer of Constitutions.'⁹ Awareness that Bonaparte was attempting to free himself from the influence of others was probably heightened by the attention paid to the mechanics of the Consulate.¹⁰ British newspapers were soon convinced that Bonaparte dominated the new revolutionary government, despite the tripartite nature of the executive. Second Consul Roger Ducos, a former member of the Directory, was dismissed by the *Morning Chronicle* in December 1799 as being a lightweight.¹¹ Indeed, the other Consuls seem to have been regarded almost immediately as something of a standing joke in comparison with the obviously dynamic Bonaparte. In March 1800 *The Times* described the other Consuls as 'two Cyphers of his own nomination'.¹² The strong impression in newspapers in the first few months following *Brumaire* was that Bonaparte had quickly seized a degree of power and influence which had not been intended by those who had planned the coup.

Terminological change quickly accompanied recognition of Bonaparte's change in status. Within the first six months of 1800 'Buonaparte' generally became 'Bonaparte', and he was identified as the 'First Consul' or 'Chief

⁹ *The Observer* 416 December 8, 1799.

¹⁰ *The Observer* 417 December 15, 1799; *The Times* 4667 Monday December 16, 1799; *The Observer* 418 December 22, 1799; *The Times* 4674 Tuesday December 24, 1799; *The Observer* 419 December 29, 1799; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 194 January 5, 1800, esp. p. 5; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 195 [sic] January 19, 1800, pp. 18 - 20.

¹¹ *Morning Chronicle* 9540 Thursday December 19, 1799; Paul W. Schroeder *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763 - 1848* (Oxford, 1994), p. 207.

¹² *The Times* 4754 Thursday March 27, 1800.

Consul'.¹³ The former change may have been inspired by a declaration on the subject issued by the Consul himself not long after *Brumaire*; it may also have been simple recognition that the Francophone equivalent was now more appropriate. The Italianate form did continue in parlance, and the terms 'Chief Consul' and 'Bonaparte' seem to have been used interchangeably in most newspapers. The new First Consul was also catapulted into all areas of news reporting and commentary. For the first time he began to be located in constitutional and political contexts.¹⁴ This was to be expected, now that he was the arbiter of events within France and the director of the stream of revolutionary expansionism which had spread throughout Europe. Bonaparte also became a figure of intrinsic significance. The greater attention paid to him in newspapers was accompanied by the publication of both supportive and critical ephemera. These included polemical pamphlets and biographies, which in turn received attention from the reviews. Bonaparte's assumption of political power also encouraged a greater interest in his person, something reflected by the increasing proportion of newspaper anecdotes devoted to stories about him. The *Morning Post* noted on one occasion that Bonaparte had ordered women to cover up their *décolletage* by ordering a good fire be laid, punned as giving them a good roasting.¹⁵ Such detail had not been characteristic of his presence in newspapers prior to *Brumaire*. Stories such as this one fleshed out news reports and offered readers a more detailed portrait of the new revolutionary ruler.

Encapsulated in British recognition of Bonaparte as First Consul was the belief that the course of the Revolution had been diverted. Newspapers were quick to point out that an oligarchy had been replaced by a personal regime

¹³ For example *The Observer* 443 June 15, 1800. *Bell's Weekly Messenger* began the linguistic shift in its issue 190 December 15, 1799, pp. 393 - 394.

¹⁴ This became standard in all newspapers after *Brumaire*; for an example see *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 195 January 19, 1800, pp. 17, 18, 20.

¹⁵ *Morning Post* 9827 Tuesday March 11, 1800.

dominated by a revolutionary general. But although there were strong concerns about this change, few lamented the demise of the Directories. These regimes had been regarded as corrupt, their constitutions being manipulated by a shrinking group of men who regularly purged themselves of moderates. Even *The Times* agreed that Bonaparte had not overthrown an innocent and uncorrupt regime, although it was cynical about the value of comparisons between successive revolutionary governments.¹⁶ Soon after *Brumaire* the *Morning Chronicle* stated that the coup's supporters were using the corruption of the Directory as justification for Bonaparte's actions. It was fairly sceptical on this point, claiming that 'such is the apology for the 18th Brumaire, and such has been the apology for every unconstitutional act by which ambitious men have seized on power, and their partizans have justified it.'¹⁷ But there was a feeling that the Directory had betrayed the spirit of the Revolution. *The Annual Register* for 1799 argued that the Directors had been more interested in jostling among themselves for influence rather than applying themselves to the problems of their country.¹⁸

Not every newspaper was willing to move beyond the question of the illegitimacy of the entire Revolution. *The Times* refused initially even to acknowledge the *de facto* existence of the Consulate. The conservative newspaper claimed that the only solution to the problems of the French would be the return of the Bourbon monarchy, rather than any degree of stability achieved by revolutionary governments. *The Times* informed its readers that they should not forgive Bonaparte his usurpation of the executive power merely because he

¹⁶ *The Times* 4723 Wednesday February 19, 1800; for acknowledgement of the dubious nature of the previous regimes, see *The Times* 4711 Wednesday February 5, 1800 and *The Times* 4721 Monday February 17, 1800.

¹⁷ *Morning Chronicle* 9521 Wednesday November 27, 1799.

¹⁸ *The Annual Register* for 1799, p. 316.

seemed to be restoring some stability to France.¹⁹ The virulence of some of the comment suggests that the paper believed the First Consul was being treated too sympathetically. 'It is melancholy to acknowledge that he will be judged by success, and that the nations of Europe will treat with him, if he triumphs, who, if, defeated, will be no more than a bloody Tyrant and an impotent Usurper!' it trumpeted when noting the forthcoming campaign Bonaparte was planning in Italy.²⁰

Nonetheless, even *The Times* was forced to adopt a rather more pragmatic attitude as the months passed and Bonaparte consolidated his position. The paper reluctantly acknowledged some of the beneficial actions of the new government, conceding that Bonaparte had allowed the exporting of French grain to Britain during provision shortages.²¹ The reporting of the recalling of revolutionary committees from other countries in January 1800 was described not disapprovingly as relieving other countries of the revolutionary burden.²² But despite a grudging acknowledgement of the existence of the Consulate, the subtext in *The Times* remained stubbornly in favour of the Bourbons. The only reform the paper believed Bonaparte should undertake was to relinquish his exalted but illegitimate position.

One critical feature of the British opinions about Bonaparte which began to develop after *Brumaire* was a reinterpretation of the events of his previous career. Some of these differed markedly from what had been believed even two or three months before. One good example of this was his linking to the French

¹⁹ *The Times* 4694 Tuesday January 16, 1800.

²⁰ *The Times* 4752 Tuesday March 25, 1800.

²¹ *The Times* 4742 Thursday March 13, 1800.

²² *The Times* 4692 Tuesday January 14, 1800; *The Observer* 422 January 19, 1800.

invasion of Switzerland,²³ which had been launched while Bonaparte had been in Egypt in 1798 and with which he had not been previously associated.²⁴ Commentators began to search for ways to explain how Bonaparte had ended up ruler of France; how a republican general who only months earlier had been bogged down in the Egyptian desert had become one of the most influential figures in Europe. From this need came the beginnings of the legend that Bonaparte had abandoned his troops in Egypt to return to seize power at home. The first sporadic references to the desertion of troops began to appear after the news of *Brumaire*.²⁵ They were probably mined from accounts of the expedition by British observers, which began to circulate in the year following the coup.²⁶ The theme was one which could only have originated after the event; as the second chapter of this thesis has demonstrated, before November 1799 there was no justifiable reason for Britons to believe that Bonaparte would end up as ruler of France. At the time of the coup *The Times* claimed that Bonaparte had been recalled by Barras,²⁷ but over the following months most newspapers shifted their emphasis to claiming that Bonaparte had engineered his own return to

²³ Implied in the narrative of Reverend Charles Edward Stewart *Thoughts on the Letter of Buonaparte, on the pacifick principles, and last speech of Mr Fox. By a Suffolk Freeholder*, 1800, pp. 21 - 22. The Reverend Charles Edward Stewart (c. 1748 - 1819), rector of Reed in Suffolk, who identified himself as the 'Suffolk Freeholder' in his publications, is identified as an opponent of the liberal *Critical and Monthly Reviews* and a Tory pamphleteer by Emily Lorraine de Montluzin *The Anti-Jacobin 1798 - 1800. The Early Contributors to the Anti-Jacobin Review* (London, 1988), pp. 148 - 149. Stewart's pamphlet was probably written in the first two months of 1800, as it was reviewed on p. 359 of the *Gentleman's Magazine* for April 1800.

²⁴ G. Bonnard 'The Invasion of Switzerland and English Public Opinion (January to April 1798)', *English Studies. A journal of English Letters and Philology*, 22, 1940, pp. 1 - 26.

²⁵ *The Times* 4709 Monday February 3, 1800.

²⁶ Review of *The French Expedition into Syria, comprising General Buonaparte's letters, with General Berthier's Narrative, and Sir William Sidney Smith's Letters, from the London Gazette in Monthly Review* 31, January - April 1800, pp. 218 - 219.

²⁷ *The Times* 4644 Wednesday November 20, 1799.

Europe. He became 'the runaway First Consul',²⁸ characterised in the *Morning Post* as a fugitive and described as having abandoned his troops for the acquisition of supreme political power instead of receiving the death he deserved.²⁹

As Bonaparte seemed increasingly unlikely to be himself removed, newspapers also began to revise their initial ideas about his role in *Brumaire*. Historians have often insufficiently recognised that historical participants are capable of changing their minds. This certainly seems to have been the case in British newspapers in the first six months of 1800. Bonaparte came to be portrayed as playing a much more significant role in *Brumaire* than had been believed at the time. His relationship with Siéyès was reconstructed to one more of plotting equals than political schemer and military adjunct. The coup was now described as having been led by an apostate priest and a Corsican officer, together forcing a new constitution on France.³⁰ This fascinating trend demonstrates that commentators were rewriting the recent past into an account which suited the state of affairs in their present.

Much of the distorted historical picture has its roots in these revisions. By juxtaposing evidence from both the reception of the coup itself and the coverage over the following months, historians like Ashton have echoed the contemporary trend without recognising it.³¹ That Bonaparte was being regarded inaccurately as the leading figure in the coup was recognised by *Bell's Weekly Messenger* in May:

Europe has assigned to BONAPARTE the exclusive honour of the 18th Brumaire, and posterity, judging by appearances only, will doubtless

²⁸ *The Observer* 432 March 30, 1800.

²⁹ *Morning Post* 4774 Wednesday January 8, 1800.

³⁰ *The Times* 4687 Wednesday January 8, 1800.

³¹ Ashton, *The Dawn of the XIXth Century in England*, p. 2.

attribute the great events of that day to his genius. Nothing, however, can be more unfounded than this supposition.

The paper reminded its readers that Bonaparte had been controlled by the shadowy abbé Siéyès, and that it had been through the plotting of others rather than through his own influence that he had achieved his present position.³² The existence of a reconstruction of Bonaparte's role in *Brumaire* which responded to day-to-day news arriving from France demonstrates that contemporary opinions were considerably more sophisticated than has been admitted. Historians have overlooked this process in their quest to chart British awareness of Bonaparte's relentless self-aggrandisement.

'A question of high importance in the eyes of English observers was the stability, as well as the character of Bonaparte's domestic administration.' Thus has MacCunn accurately assessed the most significant aspect of the discourse about Bonaparte in 1800.³³ British newspapers were by no means convinced in the months following *Brumaire* that Bonaparte's was a stable regime, or that it would last any longer than other revolutionary governments. These doubts need to be seen in the light of British views of events in Europe in the previous ten years. The achievement of stability had been promised by successive French revolutionary governments in the 1790s. In British eyes they had all become riven with factions and were overthrown as the Revolution lurched forwards. Many readers must have wondered whether the Consulate would go the same way as its predecessors, beginning boldly but being consumed by internal dissension and condemned by popular dissatisfaction.

³² *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 211 May 11, 1800, p. 145.

³³ MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, p. 30.

Rather than reducing the debate to the simplistic question of whether Bonaparte was seen as the 'child and champion' or the 'destroyer' of the Revolution, *pace* MacCunn,³⁴ the following paragraphs will identify and analyse the major issues which were identified as being causes of real or potential instability to the Consulate in the six months following *Brumaire*. While the nature of this discussion is an attempt to separate these issues so as to explore each more fully, of course each of them fed into and in many ways reinforced the others. So, for example, concern about whether Bonaparte was going to restore the legitimate monarchy led to questions about the stability of the regime because of probable hostility from republicans of all shades, which led in turn to doubts about the First Consul's ability to conclude a durable peace settlement.

The idea that the Consulate was rendered unstable because of Bonaparte's Italian ethnic origin was promoted after *Brumaire* by *The Times*. Cottrell recognises this when she claims that there were divisions of opinion about whether Bonaparte represented the French nation or whether he was a Corsican interloper, but the chronological breadth of her generalisations devalues their credibility.³⁵ *The Times* attempted to convince its readers of the illegitimacy of the new government by arguing that Bonaparte was not merely a revolutionary in the technical sense, but also in an ethnic sense. Immediately following *Brumaire* the paper speculated that Bonaparte would subside into his role as the First General of France because, as a foreigner, he would not be accepted as their ruler by the French people.³⁶ The French were satirised as having their Republic usurped not only by an ambitious general, but by a foreigner.³⁷

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 32 - 33.

³⁵ Cottrell, 'English views of France and the French', p. 231.

³⁶ *The Times* 4644 Wednesday November 20, 1799.

³⁷ *The Times* 4642 Monday November 18, 1799; more broadly, see also *The Times* 4644 Wednesday November 20, 1799; *The Times* 4650 Tuesday November 26, 1799 and *The Times* 4676 Thursday December 26, 1799.

This theme was pursued intermittently in the early months of 1800, the subject being brought up as a refrain when some new Consular political project or constitutional development was being reported.³⁸ *The Observer* argued along similar lines on at least one occasion.³⁹ But *The Times* should not be assumed to have dominated the debate, as the posited disqualification of Bonaparte from ruler over the French on ethnic grounds was soundly rejected by the opposition newspapers. The *Morning Chronicle* claimed that such allegations overlooked the fact that Corsica had been united to France under the monarchy,⁴⁰ while the *Morning Post* criticised 'The Ministerial Paper that has set up the hue and cry of "*Corsican Robber*" after the heels of BUONAPARTE.'⁴¹ It is significant that these newspapers were cautiously supportive of the new regime, and therefore unwilling to accept what were regarded as the spurious arguments against the existence of the Consulate.

The question of the stability of the new regime was linked with the prospect of peace, although the former was of more immediate concern. The Pitt ministry had conducted fruitless negotiations with the Directory in late 1796 and again from June until October 1797, the latter having been sabotaged by the *Fructidor* purge through which Barras and his supporters gained control of the Directory.⁴² That peace might emerge from the result of *Brumaire* was encouraged by reports of Bonaparte's comments during the coup,⁴³ but was

³⁸ *The Times* 4687 Wednesday January 8, 1800; *The Times* 4692 Tuesday January 14, 1800; *The Times* 4704 Tuesday January 28, 1800; *The Times* 4763 Tuesday April 8, 1800.

³⁹ *The Observer* 434 April 13, 1800.

⁴⁰ *Morning Chronicle* 9526 Tuesday December 3, 1799.

⁴¹ *Morning Post* 9772 Monday January 6, 1800.

⁴² Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, pp. 160 - 164, 173 - 176. See also Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, pp. 157 - 158.

⁴³ *Morning Post* 9769 Thursday January 2, 1800; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 194 January 5, 1800, p. 5; *The Times* 4683 Monday January 6, 1800; *Morning Post* 9772

prompted more especially by his offer to open negotiations in a letter addressed directly to George III at Christmas 1799. This received a swift and cold response from Grenville, Pitt's foreign minister.⁴⁴ The opposition newspapers criticised this very heavily, although they recognised that the offer had been motivated by domestic as well as foreign policy concerns. The *Morning Post* described the First Consul's letter as being 'couched in remarkably polite terms',⁴⁵ but these papers believed that official British policy was for the restoration of the legitimate government in France, and that this was why the offer had been rejected out of hand. 'Peace and the restoration of monarchy in France are wishes which do not exist separate in the minds of the English ministry,' the *Morning Post* stated.⁴⁶ The opposition papers claimed that Grenville's response had been counter-productive, because it had been used by Bonaparte to justify his decision not to restore the legitimate king. The *Morning Chronicle* argued that the Pitt ministry's public rebuke of the offer could only aid Bonaparte, because rejection by a government committed to the return of monarchical government in France would 'remove from the character of the Chief Consul all suspicions of a concealed attachment to Feudalism.'⁴⁷ Pitt seemed to be ignoring the precedent of negotiating with revolutionary governments he had himself set in the past. Although *The Times* naturally did not share in these criticisms, its comments about the other papers indicates the depth of feeling that the technical

Monday January 6, 1800; *The Times* 4687 Wednesday January 8, 1800; *Morning Post* 9784 Monday January 20, 1800.

⁴⁴ The circumstances surrounding the reply and the ministerial reception of *Brumaire* are discussed in Piers Mackesy *War without victory. The Downfall of Pitt, 1799 - 1802* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 42 - 48.

⁴⁵ *Morning Post* 9772 Monday January 6, 1800.

⁴⁶ *Morning Post* 9769 Thursday January 2, 1800; *Morning Post* 9781 Thursday January 16, 1800.

⁴⁷ *Morning Post* 9769 Thursday January 2, 1800; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 194 January 5, 1800, p. 5; *Morning Post* 9774 Wednesday January 8, 1800; *Morning Post* 9829 Thursday March 13, 1800 (quotation).

illegitimacy of the new regime should not prevent attempts at negotiations, or at least a civil answer to what seemed a good first step.⁴⁸

The idea that the installation of a dynamic individual in command of the Revolution might bring a peace closer was re-examined many times in this period. Like much of the British discourse relating to Bonaparte, the nature of the debate and the interpretation of the Christmas letter was linked to the opinions of the day about the stability of the Consulate. Some commentators took as their benchmark Bonaparte's reputation prior to *Brumaire*, and compared this with his proclamations as First Consul in order to judge his trustworthiness. The pamphlet *Thoughts on the Letter of Buonaparte, on the pacifick principles, and last speech of Mr Fox* by the Reverend Charles Edward Stewart is a good example of this. Although ostensibly a consideration of whether a peace negotiated with Bonaparte could be a lasting settlement, the pamphlet was also a satirical vehicle for castigation of opposition leader Charles James Fox's support for the new regime in France. As well as criticising the First Consul's presumptuous styling of his letter as from one crowned head to another,⁴⁹ Stewart argued that Bonaparte's military career rendered him an untrustworthy individual with whom to negotiate for peace. The author referred to a speech made by Bonaparte before *Brumaire*, in which

he maintained that the existence of the French Republic, and of the British Government was incompatible, addressed his soldiers as the future Army of England, and promised them laurels yet more glorious, to be plucked on the banks of the Thames.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *The Times* 4687 Wednesday January 8, 1800.

⁴⁹ Stewart, *Thoughts on the Letter of Buonaparte*, pp. 13 - 14.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 14 - 15.

Stewart concluded that the First Consul's military background and his previous warlike proclamations were evidence that peace was not in his nature, an assertion with which the pamphlet's reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* agreed.⁵¹

More revealing than pamphlet literature obviously written in support of the ministerial position were persistent references to the idea of Bonaparte as potential peacemaker in the press. These probably reflect the state of war-weariness in Britain in 1800. The author of the pamphlet *Considerations concerning peace* professed to believe that Bonaparte's offer of peace was a strategic manoeuvre, but queried anxiously whether Britain was to fight until another revolutionary ruler took Bonaparte's place, or even further, until the Bourbons themselves were restored, something the French people themselves might not accept.⁵² An article entitled 'BONAPARTE, in his relations to England' in the *Morning Post* in March 1800 reminded readers of the peace offer of three months before and undertook a detailed examination of the question.⁵³ The fact that this issue was still being discussed in newspapers some four months after it had been rejected officially, in a medium which concentrated on day-to-day news, indicates that the idea of Bonaparte as potential peacemaker was still being regarded as a serious possibility well into the new year. Recognition that the offer had been for domestic consumption in both countries did not prevent it from being grasped as a potential blueprint for peace. Perhaps any approach was taken seriously, regardless of awareness of the ulterior motives behind its offer.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 15. Review of *Thoughts on the Letter of Buonaparte* in *Gentleman's Magazine* for April 1800, p. 359.

⁵² *Considerations concerning peace. By a fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge*, 1800, pp. 20 - 21.

⁵³ *Morning Post* 9829 Thursday March 13, 1800.

Whether or not Bonaparte (and in the first few months, Siéyès) were intending to restore the legitimate monarchy was another factor which British commentators saw as mitigating against the potential stability of the Consulate. There was a feeling that Bonaparte might have accepted the office of First Consul solely to remove some of the extremes of revolutionism and as a prelude to recalling the Bourbons. Certainly there were strong reports of this belief in the immediate aftermath of *Brumaire*. The *Morning Post* claimed that reports of the impending restoration of the legitimate king were circulating in London.⁵⁴ The paper itself was more dubious, as it was in early December when it noted that the Brest fleet had mutinied in favour of a royal restoration and that many people saw this as an indication that the legitimate monarchy was about to be restored.⁵⁵ Commentators believed that early moves such as allowing the return of royalist *émigrés* were tentative steps towards a moderated regime, leaving the door open for the eventual restoration of the legitimate government.⁵⁶

The question of the potential restoration of legitimate religion accompanied early considerations of the possible restoration of the monarchy. Some newspapers speculated in the early months of 1800 that Bonaparte was sympathetic to the restoration of traditional worship. The *Morning Post* noted that Bonaparte had agreed to the return of the Archbishop of Paris, and expressed the hope that the First Consul would restore the Christian religion in France.⁵⁷ British newspapers did realise, however, that there were strong reasons against believing that Bonaparte would restore either the legitimate monarchy or organs of the *ancien régime* in France. The most significant of these was an awareness

⁵⁴ *Morning Post* 9730 Monday November 18, 1799.

⁵⁵ *Morning Post* 9743 Tuesday December 3, 1799.

⁵⁶ *Morning Post* 9772 Monday January 6, 1800; *The Times* 4692 Tuesday January 14, 1800; *The Observer* 422 January 19, 1800.

⁵⁷ *Morning Post* 9810 Wednesday February 19, 1800.

that the First Consul was not likely to give up his new power and authority. Should he and Si  y  s attempt to create a constitutional king (such as the son of the Duke of Orleans, who had accepted the Revolution), they would alienate their republican supporters of all shades while failing to gain support from royalists.⁵⁸ The issue of whether Bonaparte was going to restore the Bourbon monarchy receded as the new formal constitution was revealed, Si  y  s faded into the background of events and Bonaparte entrenched himself into a benevolent suzerainty over the French republicans.

British recognition that *Brumaire* marked the hijacking of the Revolution by military intervention⁵⁹ also prompted concern that the Consulate would not prove to be a stable form of government. The argument that the new government would not even last as a revolutionary regime because of its violent origins was one conducive to some commentators. *Bell's Weekly Messenger* described the Consulate in early 1800 as the 'fabrication of military despotism' and on these grounds denied that the new government was any more stable than its predecessors.⁶⁰ The Reverend Charles Edward Stewart stated in *Thoughts on the Letter of Buonaparte on the pacifick principles* that Bonaparte's regime was based on military power, despite the First Consul's attempts to assume the mantle of constitutional legitimacy.⁶¹ Events forced newspapers to confront the issue of the Consulate as a military government. The news from France in February and March was dominated by reports of the preparations for the renewed campaign in Italy.⁶² The presence of a military revolutionary ruler

⁵⁸ *Morning Post* 9743 Tuesday December 3, 1799.

⁵⁹ This point is brought out nicely in Schroeder's *The Transformation of European Politics*, p. 207, and by Cookson in *The Friends of Peace*, p. 169 - 170.

⁶⁰ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 197 February 2, 1800, p. 36; also *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 194 January 5, 1800, p. 5.

⁶¹ Stewart, *Thoughts on the Letter of Buonaparte*, pp. 13 - 14.

posed a considerable problem for those newspapers relatively sympathetic to the Revolution, and they resorted to tortuous means of justifying *Brumaire* and the existence of the Consulate. The *Morning Chronicle* claimed in December that the Bonaparte faction might make beneficial use of the power which it had acquired.⁶³ The paper stated several weeks later that although the coup was technically a military usurpation, it could be justified because the French people had both acquiesced in it and seemed content with its result.⁶⁴

The theme of the introduction of military power into the Revolution permeated the discourse. Explicit references were often made to Bonaparte's military background and the military features of the new regime. *The Observer* claimed that the military nature of the regime was demonstrated by the First Consul's frequent reviews of troops in person,⁶⁵ while *The Times* noted satirically that 'BUONAPARTE continues to review the troops, and to receive oaths of fidelity, which have only been six times violated already.'⁶⁶ This was linked to a belief that the First Consul's continuing political existence depended on the consent and support of the armed forces. The support the army had given to Bonaparte during *Brumaire*, it was argued, would require recompense.⁶⁷ These concerns had obvious consequences for considerations of whether or not a durable peace could be negotiated between France and Great Britain. If the First Consul were to offend his supporters in the armed forces, he might be removed

⁶² *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 197 February 2, 1800, p. 33; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 203 March 16, 1800, p. 81; *Morning Post* 9841 Thursday March 27, 1800; *Morning Post* 9851 Tuesday April 8, 1800.

⁶³ *Morning Chronicle* 9531 Monday December 9, 1799.

⁶⁴ *Morning Chronicle* 9543 Monday December 23, 1799.

⁶⁵ *The Observer* 432 March 30, 1800.

⁶⁶ *The Times* 4655 Monday December 2, 1799.

⁶⁷ *The Observer* 416 December 8, 1799; see *Morning Post* 9924 Tuesday July 1, 1800 for the persistence of this idea.

and replaced by a figure more responsive to their needs. The author of the pamphlet *Considerations concerning peace* doubted that the Bonaparte regime could sustain a peace, claiming that Bonaparte himself would be succeeded by other military Consuls who would reject previous agreements.⁶⁸

Indeed, a case can be made that British readers might not have regarded Bonaparte's political position as being secure until the victorious conclusion of the renewed campaign against the Austrians in the summer of 1800. Upon Bonaparte's departure for Italy in April *The Times* claimed that the new government was still insecure, and criticised the First Consul for not making a decisive first move in the campaign which would reassure his supporters in Paris.⁶⁹ Political undercurrents were present in reporting and commentary on the battle of Marengo in June. Bonaparte was described as planning the battle carefully because the security of his government depended on his ability to re-establish successfully the French position in Italy. The *Morning Post* stated that:

A defeat of BONAPARTE would be dangerous indeed not only to his reputation and power, but to the existence of the French government; and possessing, as he does, the choice of his station and army, he will insure victory before he draws his sword.⁷⁰

Similar ideas were repeated in July, Bonaparte's political power being depicted as both relying upon and being reinforced by his military abilities and experience.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *Considerations concerning peace*, pp. 12 - 14.

⁶⁹ *The Times* 4780 Monday April 28, 1800.

⁷⁰ *Morning Post* 9883 Wednesday May 14, 1800.

⁷¹ *Morning Post* 9924 Tuesday July 1, 1800.

The most significant issue in the British reaction to *Brumaire* was the relationship between Bonaparte as revolutionary ruler and the other republicans within France. This question has been recognised by historians, MacCunn devoting an entire chapter to it. Unfortunately the chapter continues the rather muddled use of evidence from different periods characteristic of the entire book.⁷² However, Hedva Ben-Israel sums up the position taken by historians well when he states:

English opinions on Napoleon can therefore hardly be reduced to any hard lines and even on the favourite question of whether he was the heir or the destroyer of the Revolution the party writers were hopelessly muddled, changing their ambiguous views under the influence of the latest news or the current political debate.⁷³

As the following paragraphs will make clear, the major preoccupation of British discussion of the relationship between the new First Consul and the Revolution was the question of the stability of the new government.

Initially the British conception of this relationship was rather confused. Aside from the obvious fact that he was a revolutionary, and awareness of his previous political relationship with Barras, British newspapers had little information with which to speculate about Bonaparte's exact shade of republicanism. The *Morning Chronicle* claimed immediately after *Brumaire* that the new ruler would establish a more democratic form of government than had existed under the Directory.⁷⁴ But encouraged by the emergence of a single figure to revolutionary rule and the news which began to emerge from France in

⁷² Chapter entitled 'The Relations of Bonaparte to the Revolution' in MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, pp. 32 - 47.

⁷³ Ben-Israel, *English Historians on the French Revolution*, p. 26.

⁷⁴ *Morning Chronicle* 9521 Wednesday November 27, 1799; also *Morning Chronicle* 9531 December 9, 1799.

the weeks after the coup, British newspapers began to portray Bonaparte as an umbrella-like figure superimposed over the various republican factions. As First Consul he was seen as attempting to reinvigorate the Revolution through a policy of reconciling the diverse and antagonistic republican factions.

Bonaparte's initial appointments of men of differing political persuasions on merit were noted as evidence that the concept of the umbrella republican leader seemed to be working. The author of the article 'BONAPARTE, in his relations to France' envisaged the First Consul as strengthening the executive arm of the French government in order to deal equally firmly with the oligarchical and democratic factions. The article stated that Bonaparte had been placed on the republican throne because he was a talented, commanding man of proven ability. The stability which the installation of a strong revolutionary executive was giving to France would allow the Revolution to progress without injury to property, the protection of property being the basis of stability.⁷⁵ The underlying implication was that from this would come the opportunity for an end to the Revolutionary war. The elevation of a national hero into what was essentially a monarchical position was regarded as overcoming the deficiencies which the Directory had represented: an internally divided revolutionary executive. The article hoped that the moderate form of republicanism Bonaparte was pursuing, coupled with the restoration of a single figure to rule, might be enough to attract support from the moderate royalists.⁷⁶ One suspects that these arguments were developed not only in response to news from France, but that a degree of wish-fulfilment was also present. It must have been tempting to

⁷⁵ *Morning Post* 9827 Tuesday March 11, 1800. The paper was careful to once again stress that it deplored the means by which Bonaparte had entered government, but given the detailed and sympathetic tone of the article such comments begin to seem formulaic rather than convincing.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

portray Bonaparte as bringing the chaotic elements into which the Revolution had descended into some kind of order.

The attempts to reform some of the more virulent features of revolutionism and the introduction of a more stringent morality were accepted cautiously as steps towards moderation. Through policies such as the restoration of pre-revolutionary parlance, Bonaparte was believed to be playing down republican anti-monarchical sentiment.⁷⁷ The *Morning Post* reported that he had ordered the removal of the inscription which recorded the date of the fall of the monarchy in France from the gates of the Tuileries.⁷⁸ The same newspaper related in July that the First Consul was removing the physical landmarks of the Revolution in an attempt to efface reminders of revolutionary excesses. It claimed that the decision to change the Place de la Revolution to the Place de la Concorde, and the erection of fountains to wash away the blood from the square 'is certainly a measure of great policy in BONAPARTE. It is not enough to persuade men by reasoning. Something to eye as well as the mind, has a much more powerful effect on the multitude than is commonly imagined.'⁷⁹ Thus was the new regime believed to be removing physical evidence of its predecessors, and depriving its opponents of metaphorical reference points.

British newspapers also recognised that these policies were provoking the Jacobins, and thus undermining much of the stability the new regime was striving to create. One anecdote in the *Morning Post* commented that Bonaparte was being charitable in providing a hospital for the blind, particularly as he had recently thrown dust into the eyes of so many republicans.⁸⁰ The unpopularity of

⁷⁷ *The Times* 4735 Wednesday March 5, 1800; *The Observer* 429 March 9, 1800; *The Times* 4742 Thursday March 13, 1800.

⁷⁸ *Morning Post* 9834 Wednesday March 19, 1800.

⁷⁹ *Morning Post* 9938 Thursday July 17, 1800.

the First Consul with democratic revolutionaries was conveyed by reports of assassination attempts. In April the *Morning Chronicle* stated that Bonaparte had been delayed in setting out for the campaign in Italy because of a Jacobin plot against his person. Ironically, the paper stated that the news had been kept secret in Paris because of the First Consul's policy of not irritating the various republican factions by accusing them.⁸¹ And Bonaparte's hasty return to Paris without concluding a settlement with the Austrians in July was attributed by *The Times* to disturbances generated by opposing republican factions.⁸²

Thus in the first six months of 1800 Bonaparte was regarded as having achieved mixed results in his role as republican conciliator. Part of the reason for this was hardly his fault, as the democratic revolutionaries were as opposed to a strong revolutionary executive as they were to the legitimate king. But commentators also recognised that the First Consul's vigorous exercise of the powers of his office had also contributed to his unpopularity. The *Morning Post* claimed that the 'party of the philosophical Republicans' were jealous of the party of 'Concord' who were sacrificing republican principles for unanimity and stability, and 'who, under pretence of crushing all factions, assume a sovereign, a despotic authority.'⁸³ The general impression the newspapers conveyed to their readers was that although events in France appeared to be moving towards a moderated republicanism, the underlying dissatisfaction of the democratic republicans threatened any stability which Bonaparte managed to achieve.

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⁸⁰ *Morning Post* 9769 Thursday January 2, 1800.

⁸¹ *Morning Post* 9856 Monday April 14, 1800.

⁸² *The Times* 4842 Wednesday July 9, 1800, and see also *The Times* 4854 Wednesday July 23, 1800.

⁸³ *Morning Post* 9941 Monday July 21, 1800.

MacCunn's claim that 'the importance of Marengo does not lie in its being a decisive stroke against the Austrians, for it was Moreau's victory at Hohenlinden which ended the war, but in its confirmation of his power' is an accurate assessment of the state of British ideas about the immediate stability of Bonaparte's regime.⁸⁴ The conclusion of the summer campaign in Italy in July 1800 marks the end of the period in which attention of the British press was focused mainly on the stability of the Consulate, and relations between the First Consul and other republicans. Of course, many of the themes and questions discussed in this chapter remained a feature of the period covered in the next, which will look at the following eighteen months until the conclusion of peace preliminaries between France and Britain in the autumn of 1801. But it is worth reiterating that the debates in the first six months of 1800 were fuelled in most part by questions about the stability of the new revolutionary regime, rather than the concerns about peace which dominated the following year.

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⁸⁴ MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, p. 29.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bonaparte and peacemaking: from the summer of 1800 to the autumn of 1801.

The eighteen months of peace negotiations between the summer of 1800 and the autumn of 1801 was a period in which British views of Napoleon Bonaparte were a response to events and trends of unprecedented direct interest to their own country. The following paragraphs will demonstrate that the major concern was whether Bonaparte was willing and able to negotiate a durable peace. Historians have established that Pitt and his ministers were prepared to negotiate with any government in France they believed to be stable. This had been the basis of the negotiations undertaken with the Directory in 1796 and 1797.¹ These insights were denied to the newspapers. They remembered the hostile response to Bonaparte's peace offer at Christmas 1799, and would also have been aware of the legacy of previous negotiations which had ended in acrimony or simply trailed off without conclusion. Opinion was therefore divided about whether the primary obstacle to a settlement between France and Britain was Pitt or Bonaparte. The pacification of Europe at Lunéville in the spring of 1801 and the replacement of Pitt with Addington seemed encouraging signs, but a settlement was never regarded as a certainty. Commentators were aware that peace between France and Britain depended on whether this was what Bonaparte truly desired, and whether domestic conditions would enable him to achieve his aims.

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¹ John Clarke *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy 1782 - 1865. The National Interest* (London, 1989), p. 90; Michael Duffy 'British Policy in the War against Revolutionary France' in Colin Jones (ed.) *Britain and Revolutionary France: conflict, subversion and propaganda* (Exeter, 1983), p. 21; Mackesy, *War without victory*, p. 33.

British newspapers conveyed to their readers the impression that a general settlement was now possible with the news in July of the signing of an armistice between France and Austria.² Over the following months newspapers charted and analysed events in Europe, subjecting Bonaparte's behaviour and possible motives to an intensive scrutiny. Some papers were optimistic of a rapid settlement in the aftermath of the French success at the battle of Marengo. *Bell's Weekly Messenger* predicted an early peace,³ and the *Morning Post* reminded its readers that Britain was the only state still formally fighting for the restoration of the Bourbons, the implication being that peace could be achieved if Britain relinquished its support for the exiled French king.⁴ Recognition that Bonaparte was conducting peace negotiations did not, however, preclude awareness of the effect of his wider activities in Europe on the prospect of a settlement. It was believed that the First Consul was about to embark on a further round of revolutionising in Italy, having driven the Austrians out of the region. This was the main reason why the *Morning Post* doubted the prospect of a general settlement when reporting news of the armistice between France and Austria. The paper believed that Bonaparte wished to carry revolutionary expansion further into Italy and perhaps even to Greece,⁵ while *The Times* claimed in September that the First Consul's grand plan was to 'expose every frontier in Europe to the destructive in-roads of the French hordes'.⁶ The legacy

² *The Times* 4840 Monday July 7, 1800; *Morning Post* 9936 Tuesday July 15, 1800; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 221 July 20, 1800, pp. 223 and 227; *The Times* 4859 Tuesday July 29, 1800; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 223 August 3, 1800, p. 245; *Morning Post* 9974 Wednesday August 27, 1800.

³ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 217 June 22, 1800, p. 195.

⁴ *Morning Post* 9967 Tuesday August 19, 1800; also *The Observer* 451 August 10, 1800.

⁵ *Morning Post* 9955 Tuesday August 5, 1800; *Morning Post* 9967 Tuesday August 19, 1800 and see also *Morning Post* 10 049 Monday November 24, 1800.

⁶ *The Times* 4912 Monday September 29, 1800.

of revolutionism thus persisted in British perceptions of Bonaparte's strategic objectives during the peace negotiations.

The major issue in the autumn of 1800 was whether Britain and Austria would both be included in any settlement with France.⁷ The two states were coalition partners in the Revolutionary war. But while negotiations between France and Austria progressed, those between France and Great Britain faltered. Peace preliminaries were concluded between France and Austria in the late summer, and these were reported widely in British newspapers in August and September.⁸ The commentaries reveal an underlying sense of disappointment, perhaps of betrayal. Newspapers were very concerned that the Austrians had negotiated an agreement which did not include Britain.⁹ Professing support for Pitt and his ministers, *The Times* claimed that this was a ploy on Bonaparte's behalf to isolate Great Britain from her ally.¹⁰

But there were suspicions from some quarters that the British ministry was insincere in its stated wishes for peace, and that the issue of discontent at separate negotiations between France and Austria were being used to prolong the war.

It will ever be thus till we have at the head of English Government men who sincerely wish for peace, and who will watch the most favourable

⁷ *Morning Post* 9936 Tuesday July 15, 1800; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 221 July 20, 1800, pp. 223 and 227; *The Times* 4859 Tuesday July 29, 1800; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 223 August 3, 1800, p. 245; *The Times* 4876 Monday August 18, 1800; *Morning Post* 9974 Wednesday August 27, 1800; *The Times* 4912 Monday September 29, 1800.

⁸ *The Times* 4873 Thursday August 14, 1800; *The Times* 4876 Monday August 18, 1800; *Morning Post* 9974 Wednesday August 27, 1800; *Morning Post* 9997 Tuesday September 23, 1800; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 231 September 28, 1800, p. 306.

⁹ For example *The Times* 4849 Thursday July 17, 1800; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 239 November 23, 1800, p. 372.

¹⁰ *The Times* 4876 Monday August 18, 1800.

opportunity of concluding it. Not those who spurn the overtures of a dismayed enemy, and cringe to him when triumphant,

the *Morning Post* opined.¹¹ The newspaper told its readers that the Pitt ministry was hoping that by intertwining their interests with the Austrians, they would be able to proclaim to the British people that Bonaparte was insincere in his peace pronouncements. 'All this joint negotiation means only joint war', it stated.¹² The reactionary British ministry, rather than Bonaparte, was presented as the true barrier to peace. Pitt himself was believed to have insisted on a restoration of the Bourbons as a condition for any settlement. The *Morning Post* claimed that both Pitt and Bonaparte wished to make names for themselves, the First Consul by erecting a great regime, Pitt 'by making a King, and re-erecting a great Monarchy'.¹³

Interwoven with commentary on these negotiations was a continuing exploration of issues relating to Bonaparte's role as head of the revolutionary government. The nature of the Consular regime and of Bonaparte's reforms were subjected to searching analyses. Such reforms had begun in the six months following *Brumaire*. But because of the trickling down of news and opinion through newspapers into pamphlets, reviews and letters of comment to magazines, much commentary percolated through the British press during the eighteen months which constitute this chapter. Considerations of the social, political and ideological consequences of the First Consul's domestic reforms appeared at the same time as day-to-day news of peace negotiations and the state of affairs in Europe.

¹¹ *Morning Post* 10 011 Thursday October 9, 1800.

¹² *Morning Post* 9974 August 27, 1800; *Morning Post* 10 046 Thursday November 20, 1800 (quotation).

¹³ *ibid.*

Newspapers concentrated on the link between Bonaparte's activities within France and on the international stage. Opinions about his attempts to strengthen France from within influenced commentary about peacemaking. Much of the news which trickled into Britain in this period seemed to indicate that France under Bonaparte was a more stable revolutionary state, probably raising hopes of a durable peace.

In the whole of the financial plans, or, as we would say, the budget of Buonaparte, there is an air of justice, equity and lenity to the great mass, and at the same time an address to the sanguine temper of the French nation, ever prone to sacrifice a great deal to hope,

The Annual Register claimed. The article concluded with approbation that the Consuls seemed anxious to foster internal reconstruction rather than applying their energies to further predations on European states.¹⁴ Desiring the title of Grand Pacificator at home and abroad was regarded by many as Bonaparte's main ambition. His persistence at negotiations despite difficulties and breakdowns seemed to be evidence of this.¹⁵ It was argued that these aims would reinforce each other. A settlement in Europe in his favour would allow Bonaparte to cultivate support domestically and undertake further reforms. The peace settlement would in turn be made secure because of the First Consul's security at home.¹⁶

Attention was focussed on Bonaparte's personal domination of the Revolutionary government, and whether this would allow him to take a firm position during peace negotiations. The general consensus was that peace was

¹⁴ *The Annual Register* for 1800, pp. 44 - 47, 55; quotation, p. 47. A footnote to p. 167 states that this volume was being written in September 1800.

¹⁵ *Morning Post* 9974 August 27, 1800.

¹⁶ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 223 August 3, 1800, p. 245; the idea is reiterated *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 251 February 15, 1801, p. 49.

more likely now that French political life was controlled by a single figure; the issue was no longer the pawn of rival factions within the Directory. British conceptions of Bonaparte as a quasi-monarchical figure were underlined by awareness that Bonaparte was the man who could play a key role in concluding the Revolutionary war.¹⁷ James Gee described Bonaparte in the *Gentleman's Magazine* as 'the new Corsican King in France', commenting that it would be an astonishing act of Providence should Bonaparte be the vehicle for the restoration of peace in Europe.¹⁸ The statement that 'the Consulate is hardly one remove from Monarchy' in an article in *Bell's Weekly Messenger* urging the formation of a Franco-British alliance against Russia seems very matter-of-fact, with little obvious condemnation of the nature of Bonaparte's office. The First Consul's personal exercise of foreign policy was instead implied to be valuable in rendering French behaviour more consistent than that of his squabbling predecessors.¹⁹

Recognition of Bonaparte's moves towards peace and acceptance of the existence of a French pseudo-monarch did not mean that commentators ignored concerns about what seemed only sketchy limits to the First Consul's powers. He was, of course, the first man to occupy the office, and there is a strong sense that he was making the office into something in his own fashion. Comments were certainly made which betray an underlying concern about the amount of power concentrated in one man's hands. In February 1801 the *Morning Post* noted that Bonaparte had the right of nomination in all organs of government.²⁰ *The Annual Register* suggested that the office of First Consul had almost unlimited powers of

¹⁷ *Morning Post* 9967 Tuesday August 19, 1800.

¹⁸ James Gee, letter in *Gentleman's Magazine* for June 1801, pp. 504 - 505.

¹⁹ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 243 December 21, 1800, p. 401.

²⁰ *Morning Post* 9815 Tuesday February 25, 1801; see also *Morning Post* 10 050 Tuesday November 25, 1800 and *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 249 February 1, 1801, p. 33.

influence, the strong implication being that the effects of the exercise of such powers were unknown. The magazine hoped that Bonaparte would 'mingle his power with moderation, benignity, and all the arts of a humane and generous policy'.²¹ Although concerns about high-handed behaviour were expressed,²² outright accusations of tyranny or conspiring to usurp from the Revolution were rare in the autumn of 1800. Probably this stemmed from awareness that the position was an elected one, and a belief that Bonaparte would in time be succeeded by others. Optimism that a strong figure would be able to restrain revolutionary energies and bring about a workable settlement overshadowed concerns about the nature of the office. British newspapers believed that the First Consul was employing his wide powers to guide his people towards peace with the other states of Europe through both diplomacy and domestic reconstruction.

The belief that Bonaparte's cultivation of internal stability boded well for external pacification was stimulated further by awareness that he was actively fostering the arts and the sciences. *The Annual Register* described the First Consul's cultural activities as complimenting his military background and making him a more well-rounded figure: 'By the former, his mind was humanized as well as enlarged, and his ruling passion, the love of glory, confirmed and exalted: from the latter, his understanding derived additional vigour, precision and promptitude,' the magazine asserted.²³ Such activities were more usually ascribed to political motives. *Bell's Weekly Messenger* claimed that Bonaparte's desire to open the French Academy owed more to self-

²¹ *The Annual Register* for 1800 narrated the extensive powers of the First Consular office on pp. 59 - 60, and then noted the almost unlimited influence they offered on p. 61. For the quotation, see p. 63.

²² *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 241 December 7, 1800, p. 391; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 270 June 21, 1801, p. 198.

²³ *The Annual Register* for 1800, p. 10.

aggrandisement than literature, and that the cultivation of culture was part of the weakening of extreme revolutionism in language and manners.²⁴ A few days later, the *Morning Post* reported the reopening of the University of Pavia in Italy, characterising the event as occurring so that romantic writers could praise Bonaparte's recent military achievements.²⁵ Nevertheless, the association of the First Consul with non-military activities is likely to have removed some of the stigma associated with his military background. The encouragement of internal reconstruction and awareness that the First Consul was involving himself in arts outside that of war boded well for the difficult art of peace.

The theme of religious reconciliation was also linked to the First Consul's attempts to pacify France, and to foster acceptance within Europe of what was still technically a revolutionary state. That Bonaparte intended to restore legitimate religion was believed to be increasingly likely after the summer campaign in Italy. His attendance at a *Te Deum* for General Dessaix in June was noted, accompanied by reports that the First Consul had written to the other Consuls from Milan, stating that he would attend the Mass for his fallen comrade regardless of the atheists of Paris.²⁶ News that the Consulate had opened negotiations with the Pope circulated from the autumn.²⁷

Commentators recognised that the restoration of Roman Catholicism, like all of Bonaparte's policies, was being undertaken as a prop for his government. The *Morning Post* commented satirically in September 1800 that while Britain was drawing up great alliances with European states, the First Consul was

²⁴ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 219 July 6, 1800, p. 209.

²⁵ *Morning Post* 9931 Wednesday July 9, 1800.

²⁶ *The Observer* 445 June 29, 1800.

²⁷ For example *The Observer* 452 August 24, 1800; *Morning Post* 9972 Monday August 25, 1800; *Morning Post* 9987 Thursday September 11, 1800; *Morning Post* 10023 Thursday October 23, 1800.

relying on support from the Pope and priests because he was in need of the popularity they would give him.²⁸ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* devoted a long article to the issue in March 1801, in which it stated that the First Consul recognised the benefit of religion in the legitimation of state authority, and that his dalliance with the Moslem religion in Egypt had been motivated by political realism. The intransigence of negotiations between the Consulate and the Papacy was attributed to the arrogance of the Pope, rather than to any scheming by the First Consul; the article appealing to traditional British antipathy for temporal papal influence. Bonaparte was portrayed as genuine in his approaches, with the cunning Pontiff insisting on impossible articles:

We are however in hopes that Bonaparte will be able to elude the snares of the Court of Rome, and re-establish the Christian religion in France, or at least a system of faith and perfect morality, without which no government can be of long duration.²⁹

It is interesting that there was a distinct tendency in some newspapers to portray Bonaparte as the well-meaning victim of legitimate authorities. We have seen already that the *Morning Post* believed that Pitt was using Bonaparte as an excuse for perpetuating the war. Bonaparte's attempts to restore the established religion of much of Europe seemed to be an indication that France was returning to the community of nations while maintaining its unique revolutionary nature.

Doubts about the strength of the First Consul's position were directed towards whether his regime was strong enough to negotiate a durable settlement. The *Morning Post* claimed in October 1800 that although doubts remained about the sincerity of Bonaparte's desire for peace, the fact that his regime was republican in form but monarchical in substance rendered him the best hope for

²⁸ *Morning Post* 9987 Thursday September 11, 1800.

²⁹ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 253 March 1, 1801, p. 65.

a settlement.³⁰ A corresponding concern was whether this hybrid regime was alienating democratic republicans; those alienated from the Consulate would also be hostile to any settlement it negotiated. *Bell's Weekly Messenger* stated in December that the First Consul was unpopular with this faction, and that if this unpopularity were to become more widespread the Consulate and its agreements would be no more secure than any other regime.³¹ The resentment from the democrats had its obvious manifestation in several attempts on Bonaparte's person. News of one such attempt in early 1801 prompted a panicky *Bell's Weekly Messenger* to claim that had it succeeded, Europe would have been thrown back into revolutionary conflict. The failure of the assassins had saved Europe from 'a renewal of the dreadful scenes of revolutionary calamity and horror'.³² If the First Consul should die, would his agreements die with him? Certainly revolutionary regimes in the past had shown few qualms about repudiating agreements made by their predecessors. The prospect of a lasting peace was therefore linked firmly with the continuing presence of Bonaparte on the republican throne, and his attempts to rally the majority of republican opinion behind him.

The Austrians resumed their campaign against the French in the winter of 1800. They were defeated decisively by a French army under General Moreau at Hohenlinden on 3 December, and moved for a rapid settlement. Under the provisions of the treaty signed at Lunéville in February 1801, the Austrian Emperor acknowledged the existence of French satellite republics in Holland and in Lombardy and Liguria in northern Italy.³³ Europe was at peace for the first

³⁰ *Morning Post* 10 023 Thursday October 23, 1800.

³¹ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 241 December 7, 1800, p. 391.

³² *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 245 January 4, 1801, p. 5. For other reports, see also *The Times* 4921 Thursday October 9, 1800; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 235 October 26, 1800, p. 337; *The Times* 5194 Thursday August 13, 1801; *The Times* 5194 Tuesday August 23, 1801.

time in nearly eight years, leaving Great Britain alone in the war against Revolutionary France.³⁴ On the international front, the British position deteriorated further with the news of the conclusion of an anti-British Armed Neutrality between Russia, Sweden, Denmark and Prussia in April.³⁵ There was little chance of her gaining an ally among the European states in the immediate future, and every reason for Britons to believe that their own country would soon be forced to come to an arrangement with France.³⁶ At the same time, for domestic reasons the Pitt ministry was replaced by that of Addington, which immediately reopened negotiations.³⁷ It is difficult not to believe that the spring of 1801 must have marked a major turning point in British awareness of their circumstances.

The reception accorded to news of the pacification of Europe depended on the sympathies of the particular periodical. It would be inaccurate to claim that Bonaparte was regarded universally as a peacemaker. It was not, after all, the peace which people had been hoping for: an end to their own conflict. So while *Bell's Weekly Messenger* was prepared to comment favourably on the news,³⁸ *The Times* accused the First Consul of attempting to make the Austrians seem the aggressors during negotiations, and claimed that the Lunéville settlement masked the First Consul's true ambitions.³⁹ Reaction to Lunéville depended largely on

³³ Mackesy, *War without victory*, p. 185.

³⁴ Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, pp. 223 - 224.

³⁵ Mackesy, *War without victory*, p. 185.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 211.

³⁷ *The Times* 5026 Tuesday February 10, 1801; *The Times* 5031 Monday February 16, 1801; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 251 February 15, 1801, p. 49, pp. 53 - 54.

³⁸ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 237 November 9, 1800, p. 353; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 259 April 12, 1801, p. 113 - 114.

³⁹ *The Times* 5014 Tuesday January 27, 1801.

whether the newspaper was broadly sympathetic to the First Consul's position, and to the prospect of a Europe in which France remained in possession of a revolutionary government.

The likelihood of peace in Europe did stimulate one of the most interesting and hitherto unrevealed ideas of this period: that the Consulate was regarded as a potential ally in the diplomatic reconstruction of Europe after the Revolutionary war. Raised in *Bell's Weekly Messenger* first in December 1800,⁴⁰ the idea that the British monarch should assist the First Consul in the reorganisation of Europe was suggested in article 19 of the same paper's 'Plan for general Pacification' in January 1801. Included in the provisions of the article was the suggestion that many territories should be rationalised further, and that the temporal power of the Pope should be dissolved.⁴¹ Similar ideas were proposed three months later in an article entitled 'Prospect of an Equitable and Permanent Peace in less than two months', which formed the basis of *Bell's Weekly Messenger's* reaction to the Lunéville settlement. The author envisaged a world ruled co-operatively by France and Great Britain, and argued that the prerequisite for any peace should be the formation of a coalition between the two states.

Great Britain and France will then consolidate their power, and establish the tranquillity of the world, so as to prevent the calamities of war for the future - a blessing that will endear to the remotest posterity the names of our Ministers, as well as that of the First Consul of France.⁴²

The argument referred to the contemporary belief that Bonaparte's attempts to end the Revolutionary war were stimulated by a desire to strengthen

⁴⁰ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 243 December 21, 1800, p. 401.

⁴¹ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 247 January 18, 1801, p. 18.

⁴² *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 259 April 12, 1801, p. 113; revisited in *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 263 May 10, 1801, p. 145.

his position at home, the implication being that an alliance with Britain was the best way to achieve this aim.

The reasons for the suggestion of an alliance between France and Britain are not immediately clear. Perhaps the idea was floated as a response to concern about unprecedented Russian influence in Europe and the Mediterranean over the previous two years.⁴³ But the very existence of such an article demonstrates that some commentators were assessing the likely security of British interests in the new Europe. Lunéville left France vastly expanded outside her eighteenth-century boundaries, with an acknowledged suzerainty over Western Europe. This must have appeared threatening to British trade with the continent, and a potential future threat to the British world position. France could pose a very real threat to British foreign interests should she embark on a course of naval expansion. The arguments in *Bell's Weekly Messenger* illustrate, therefore, both a sense of the opportunities it was believed the conclusion to the Revolutionary war offered, but also a fear that the initiative in world affairs might pass to France.

Lunéville may have encouraged speculations along these lines, but the fact that Britain remained at war with France for another seven months should warn against the idea that a settlement was regarded as inevitable. While conclusion of an armistice in March and the reopening of negotiations must have appeared good omens,⁴⁴ doubts persisted about the outcome across the summer. The newspapers available to this study for these months were pessimistic in their assessment of the chances of peace. In August, for instance, *The Times* reported a rumour circulating through the City of London that negotiations had been called off

⁴³ I am grateful to Dr. J. E. Cookson for this suggestion.

⁴⁴ *The Times* 5068 Wednesday April 1, 1801; Ashton, *The Dawn of the XIXth Century in England*, pp. 55 - 58.

because of the First Consul's insistence on terms unacceptable to the British ministers.⁴⁵

The actual course of negotiations was not followed in detail, probably because detailed information was scarce. Permeation, rather than saturation, characterised reporting and commentary.⁴⁶ Newspapers concentrated on the ways in which the First Consul was conducting the negotiations, and used these as an indication of the measure of his sincerity. The threat of force was one of these. During the negotiations in the autumn of 1800 *The Observer* and the *Morning Post* had noted the massing of troops near Boulogne, the latter linking this tactic directly with the invasion scare of the winter of 1797 - 8.⁴⁷ In the summer and autumn of 1801 *The Times* and *Bell's Weekly Messenger* both stated that the presence of troops on the French coast was a crude warning from the First Consul about the potential consequences of intransigence during peacemaking. The *Messenger* described the massing purely as a *ruse de guerre*.⁴⁸ Reiterating the theme of domestic constraints on the First Consul's foreign policy, *The Times* claimed that an invasion of Great Britain was not a realistic option for Bonaparte: the French people would not accept an invasion of a state with whom France seemed close to a peaceful settlement.⁴⁹ The invasion threat was believed instead to be a manifestation of the failure of the First Consul's other projects on

⁴⁵ *The Times* 5194 Tuesday August 23, 1801.

⁴⁶ For example *The Times* 5136 Thursday June 18, 1801; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 270 June 21, 1801, p. 197; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 282 September 6, 1801, p. 286.

⁴⁷ *Morning Post* 9943 Wednesday July 23, 1800; *The Observer* 456 September 21, 1800.

⁴⁸ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 263 May 10, 1801, p. 151. The concerns about invasion in the spring of 1801 are recognised by Wheeler and Broadley, *Napoleon and the Invasion of England*, vol. I, pp. 159 - 164, and Carola Oman *Britain against Napoleon* (London, 1942), pp. 106 - 107.

⁴⁹ *The Times* 5134 Tuesday June 16, 1801; *The Times* 5163 Monday July 20, 1801; *The Times* 5172 Thursday July 30, 1801; *The Times* 5189 Wednesday August 19, 1801.

the international stage. The French were in retreat in Egypt, Britain had captured Malta and the prospect of further co-operation between France and Russia had collapsed with the death of Czar Paul earlier in the year.⁵⁰

But newspapers were not altogether certain that Bonaparte's intentions were purely strategic. An impetuous revolutionary ruler was not necessarily bound by the traditions and logic of the diplomacy of legitimate states. Should the peace negotiations with Britain look in doubt, then the First Consul might ignore the domestic consequences and launch an invasion. Thus the papers also claimed that Bonaparte was dragging out the peace process unnecessarily, in the hope that the French international position would take a turn for the better. His concentration of troops on the northern coast was in case it did not.⁵¹ In August *The Times* wearily described the negotiations to date as being 'four unprofitable months consumed in hypothesis, virtuality and evasion', and claimed that British forbearance could no longer put up with the strategic delays made by the French government.⁵² Similar sentiments were expressed by *Bell's Weekly Messenger* in September.⁵³ Discussion of the use of invasion threat as a negotiating tactic contributed further to the belief that the First Consul had a special prejudice against Great Britain, because of defeats he had suffered at British hands.⁵⁴

That these arguments were being advanced as late as September 1801 casts considerable doubt on any idea that the primary conception of Bonaparte was as a

⁵⁰ *The Times* 5172 Thursday July 30, 1801; *The Times* 5189 Wednesday August 19, 1801; see also *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 272 July 5, 1801, p. 209. For the international situation in the summer of 1801 see Mackesy, *War without victory*, pp. 203 - 205.

⁵¹ *The Times* 5189 Wednesday August 19, 1801; *The Times* 5199 Monday August 31, 1801; *The Times* 5201 Wednesday September 2, 1801.

⁵² *The Times* 5189 Wednesday August 19, 1801.

⁵³ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 282 September 6, 1801, p. 286.

⁵⁴ *The Observer* 451 August 10, 1800.

peacemaker. This is particularly striking when one considers that the Franco-British preliminaries arrived only a few weeks later, and were greeted with great public joy. The pessimistic approach taken here is not to deny that Bonaparte might not have been regarded in some quarters as a figure who had concluded peace in Europe, and might yet do so with Great Britain. Close analysis of the arguments deployed by newspapers more favourable to Bonaparte and the Revolution than those available to this study will reveal more on this subject.

Peace preliminaries were finally concluded between M. Otto and Lord Hawkesbury in late September, and the news arrived in Britain on 1 October 1801.⁵⁵ Historians have stressed the rapturous reception accorded the arrival of the preliminaries in London, although the celebrating crowds would have had little idea of their content. General Lauriston, aide-de-camp to Bonaparte, was mobbed in front of Reddish's hotel in St. James' Street, and crowds dragged his coach to Downing Street. News of the peace was celebrated in the traditional fashion, with many buildings being decorated with transparencies and their windows being illuminated after darkness.⁵⁶ These outpourings should probably best be regarded as a spontaneous reaction to an end to war, and to months of drawn-out negotiations. It was not without reason that *The Times* greeted news of the arrival with the statement that 'The Public have long been prepared to expect the final issue of the Negotiation with the French Government.'⁵⁷ The newspaper reported extensively on the festivities held throughout the country, noting those in Maidstone, Gloucester, Bristol, Lewes, Harwich and Hull on 8 October.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, p. 226.

⁵⁶ Wheeler and Broadley, *Napoleon and the Invasion of England* vol. I, pp. 259 - 264; Ashton, *The Dawn of the XIXth Century in England*, pp. 39 - 44; Oman, *Britain against Napoleon*, pp. 104 - 105, 120. The incident with the carriage was reported in *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 288 October 18, 1801, p. 335.

⁵⁷ *The Times* 5227 Saturday October 3, 1801.

⁵⁸ *The Times* 5232 Thursday October 8, 1801.

Although historians have commendably narrated the popular reception of the preliminaries in vivid detail, and their comments are born out by the content of the newspapers, this has been at the expense of examining contemporary opinions about the articles themselves. Of the many acquisitions it had made in the course of the war, Britain was to keep only the formerly Spanish islands of Ceylon and Trinidad, while France regained all of her overseas possessions. Malta was allocated to the Knights of St. John, under the nominal supervision of one of the major European powers. France was to evacuate Egypt, Naples and the Papal territories.⁵⁹

Reflecting on the state of conflict reached immediately prior to the announcement of peace, *The Times* claimed that the war had reached a standstill, and that domestic concerns had pushed each side towards a settlement.⁶⁰ The war was described as having been necessary because the French as a people had been possessed by ideologies which had made them a danger to the internal security of the other states of Europe. The paper emphasised that the conflict was by its nature unprecedented in history: 'which neither in its native character or object can be fitly compared with any scourge or calamity with which the earth has been visited, since the subversion of the Roman Empire, and the darkness of the middle ages.'⁶¹ This point was emphasised both to remind readers of the ideological nature of the war, and to disarm potential criticism of the preliminaries. The implication was that any settlement could not be judged by the norms of eighteenth-century wars, the conclusions to which had seen Britain vastly expand her overseas possessions. Because the war had been an ideological one, there was no dishonour in Great Britain relinquishing the territories and

⁵⁹ Mackesy, *War without victory*, p. 208.

⁶⁰ *The Times* 5230 Wednesday October 7, 1801.

⁶¹ *The Times* 5227 Saturday October 3, 1801.

advantages she had captured over the previous eight years. 'There was no question of glory in its vulgar and ambitious sense; for the very principle and directing spring of the Negotiation was, to surrender whatever could be given without danger and dishonour,' *The Times* claimed. By restating that the war had not been one of expansionist imperialism, the newspaper could affirm its support for the preliminaries while marking out a position of British virtue. The peace might not be a glorious one in eighteenth-century terms, but it was an appropriate one.⁶²

Bell's Weekly Messenger regarded the preliminaries as a vindication of the Addington administration. 'Our old rulers shewed a laudable boldness in drawing the sword, but their hand trembled in the attempt of sheathing it,' the paper stated, in one of several such comments.⁶³ Criticism of Pitt as a war-mongering minister was contrasted with fulsome praise of Bonaparte's moderation and Addington's talents. The *Messenger* argued that Bonaparte had been turned away from contemplating serious negotiations with Britain because of the spurning of his initial overtures by the Pitt ministry. This was despite the fact that he had long desired a settlement with Great Britain, 'for the purpose of promoting the happiness of all mankind'.⁶⁴ The blame for the prolonging of the war was thus laid squarely with Pitt, rather than Bonaparte, and the credit for the peace was attributed both to the sincerity and gifts of Addington, and to Bonaparte's recognition of the opportunities presented by Pitt's resignation.⁶⁵

⁶² *ibid.*, *The Times* 5230 Wednesday October 7, 1801.

⁶³ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 286 October 4, 1801, p. 316; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 290 November 1, 1801, p. 345 (quotation).

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 288 October 18, 1801, p. 329.

The peace was argued to be honourable as well as slightly in the British favour, because although France had gained population and territorial influence, Britain had retained all her pre-war foreign possessions while extending her trading opportunities.⁶⁶ The *Messenger* judged the preliminaries on the whole a fair settlement of the interests of both sides.⁶⁷ Those who were critical, and who were opposed to negotiating with a revolutionary government, were characterised as ignoring Bonaparte's successful attempts to dampen the excesses of democracy in France over the past two years. The paper argued that under the guidance of the First Consul, France had been transformed into a state with a strong executive, and the decisiveness which was the key feature of Bonaparte's rule had allowed a firm decision to be made in favour of peace.⁶⁸

Consideration of the peace preliminaries offered *Bell's Weekly Messenger* another opportunity to argue in favour of an alliance between France and Great Britain. The details of this newspaper's advocacy of such a scheme in December 1800 and in the spring of 1801 have already been related. The nature of the peace preliminaries was regarded as a vindication of the paper's previous stance. Britain and France were no longer even rivals, but two Gullivers in a world of European Lilliputians.⁶⁹ The *Messenger* argued that the two states should co-operate to ensure that was no revival of conflict which would damage the interests of either. 'France and England in their present glorious condition may, by a well-concerted union, form a balance of power calculated to prevent future discord in any part of the civilized world,' the newspaper speculated in an article entitled 'No war for fifty years'.⁷⁰ An alliance would also have the benefit of

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 290 November 1, 1801, p. 345.

⁶⁸ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 286 October 4, 1801, p. 316.

⁶⁹ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 290 November 1, 1801, p. 345. The metaphor is that of the source.

reducing the expense of defence costs, a pressing issue for Britons who believed themselves to be oppressed by war taxation.⁷¹

While *Bell's Weekly Messenger* was willing to congratulate Bonaparte for his good sense in concluding peace, it also revisited its earlier attempts to refute any suggestion that France might overtake the British world position. The paper claimed that despite its hegemony over western Europe, France was no economic threat to Great Britain. It pointed to the devastation of much of the trading sector of the French economy by revolution and war, and claimed that the French were not a sufficiently commercially-minded people to challenge Britain on that front.⁷² There is an anxiousness to these arguments which belies their content. Any alliance between Great Britain and France was presented as being strongly in the interest of the latter. But the strongest message from the attention devoted to such a point is the writer's insecurity about the possible future for his own country.

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Many of the issues with which British commentators were preoccupied in the eighteen months between the summer of 1800 and the autumn of 1801 were a continuing assessment of trends which had begun in the immediate aftermath of *Brumaire*. Commentators were still concerned with whether the Consulate was a

⁷⁰ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 288 October 18, 1801, p. 329.

⁷¹ This comes out particularly in the discussion in *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 296 December 13, 1801, the implication being that a Franco-British alliance would reduce or even eliminate Britain's need to defend herself and her foreign possessions from the cost of wars which would not be allowed to occur. For the unpopularity of the income tax in particular, see Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, pp. 78 - 81, and Clive Emsley 'The Social Impact of the French Wars' in H. T. Dickinson (ed.) *Britain and the French Revolution 1789 - 1815* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke, 1989), p. 213.

⁷² *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 296 December 13, 1801, p. 393 and *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 290 November 1, 1801, p. 345.

stable regime. But at the same time they were responding to news of peace negotiations. Considerations of the First Consul's domestic reforms were shaped by awareness of these negotiations, and an underlying belief that if Bonaparte was willing and able to bring about an end to the Revolutionary war in Europe, then a peace with Great Britain was also a strong possibility. The conception of Bonaparte as a peacemaker should not be overstated; the reaction to the settlement between France and Austria at Lunéville depended on the sympathies of the relevant periodical. And awareness that France was at peace with Europe did not mean that contemporaries believed that peace between France and Great Britain was an inevitable event. What peace in Europe did stimulate were questions about the possible role of France in a post-Revolutionary conflict world, and concern about the position of Great Britain in such a world.

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CHAPTER FIVE

The Peace of Amiens: from the autumn of 1801 to April 1803.

Historians have been slow to examine the British reaction to events during the Peace of Amiens. The definitive article in English languishes in a journal published nearly ninety years ago;¹ while in their haste to consider the return to war and the flood of hostile literature which began in the summer of 1803, historians have paid little attention to the themes and concerns of the previous eighteen months. MacCunn's nine pages fail to demonstrate the relationship between opinions and events in any depth.² He cautiously advises of a limited measure of popularity, defined only in negative terms, by stating that Bonaparte was popular because he had *not* done the things which were going to come (participate in the assassination of the Bourbon pretender the Duc D'Enghien, declare himself Emperor, display outrageous personal behaviour).³ Bonaparte was not unpopular because he had not done anything terrible yet, a very circumlocutionary approach. Cottrell's model runs along similar lines; although she acknowledges that Bonaparte was popular in Britain for a time after 1801, she qualifies this hastily by arguing that one of the reasons that the literature of 1803 was so virulent was to counteract perceptions of Bonaparte as peacebringer.⁴ Wheeler and Broadley continue the teleological approach which pervades their narrative, charting the extension of the life consulship as

¹ Conrad Gill 'The Relations between England and France 1802', *The English Historical Review* 24, 1909, pp. 61 - 78; but see also Hélène Maspéro - Leclerc 'Un journaliste émigré jugé à Londres pour diffamation envers le premier consul', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 18, 2, avril - juin 1971, pp. 261 - 281.

² MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, pp. 57 - 66.

³ *ibid.*, pp. 57 - 58.

⁴ Cottrell, 'English views of France and the French', p. 248.

another stage on the long trek towards the imperial throne without considering the issues of the peace in their context.⁵

One recent diplomatic history of this period depicts Britain, like the other states of Europe, as attempting to co-exist with France on the basis of the settlements made at Lunéville and Amiens, rather than seeing the year of formal peace as merely a temporary halt to hostilities between France and the rest of Europe. Paul W. Schroeder argues that 'the British, though wary, were interested in peace, willing to try coexistence with France, and relatively indifferent at this time to the fate of Europe, including even the Low Countries.'⁶ The latter point is especially significant, given that it represented a failure to achieve the aims with which Britain ostensibly entered the war against Revolutionary France in 1793.⁷ Schroeder argues that the other states of Europe were willing to accept the hegemony France had achieved over Western Europe, as long as they were satisfied with Bonaparte's management of that hegemony. Thus the return to war between France and Great Britain in the spring of 1803 was because Britain could no longer accept 'the way he exercised French hegemony, or better, his refusal to be content with hegemony, his insistence on empire.'⁸ Schroeder argues that the points of friction within the peace were over colonial concerns - Malta, the French expansion in the West Indies and indications of renewed French presence in the eastern Mediterranean - rather than about the state of Europe. But as the following paragraphs will demonstrate, British acceptance of French hegemony within Europe did not equate with a lack of concern about events in that sphere. The newspapers and magazines consulted

⁵ Wheeler and Broadley, *Napoleon and the Invasion of England*, vol. I, p. 270.

⁶ Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, p. 228.

⁷ Michael Duffy 'British Diplomacy and the French Wars 1789 - 1815' in H. T. Dickinson (ed.) *Britain and the French Revolution* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke, 1989), pp. 129 - 130.

⁸ Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, p. 229.

in this study were far more concerned about the expansion of French influence in Europe than outside it.

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In strict geographical terms Napoleon Bonaparte was only connected indirectly with the final negotiations at Amiens, which took place between November 1801 and April 1802. In the spring of 1802 Bonaparte was ensconced in Lyons in the south of France, and his presence was reported and commented upon in British newspapers. *The Times* reported in early February, for instance, that the First Consul was regarded as a supernatural attraction, and that people were pouring in from all the surrounding areas to see him.⁹ Despite a geographical distance, Bonaparte's role in the final approval or rejection of the terms of the definitive peace was not underestimated. The British press were aware that the settlement would be shaped by Bonaparte's strategic and political concerns; their lamentations that the negotiations were being unnecessarily prolonged stemmed from recognition of this.¹⁰ Although *Bell's Weekly Messenger* had been optimistic in the final months of 1801 that a final settlement would be reached by the end of the year,¹¹ by the spring of 1802 concern about these delays was permeating the commentary. Contemporaries were rather less confident that the preliminaries of October 1801 would lead inevitably to a definitive settlement than historians have been. French negotiators were believed to be attempting to confirm possession of territories they had captured after the preliminaries of the previous autumn, while insisting that Britain

⁹ *The Times* 5320 Wednesday January 20, 1802; *The Times* 5325 Tuesday January 26, 1802; *The Times* 5327 Thursday January 28, 1802; for the anecdote about his 'supernatural' presence, see *The Times* 5332 Wednesday February 3, 1802.

¹⁰ *The Times* 5349 Wednesday February 24, 1802.

¹¹ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 288 October 18, 1801, p. 333; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 290 November 1, p. 349, p. 350; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 294 November 22, 1801, p. 381; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 296 December 13, 1801, p. 393.

relinquish her wartime gains.¹² This idea was fuelled by the French recapture of their former possessions in the West Indies, but more significantly by Bonaparte's unilateral reorganisation of the Italian states in December 1801 and January 1802. Consular proclamations decreed that Tuscany was to become a French client state, the Kingdom of Etruria. Parma was annexed to the Cisalpine Republic, and Bonaparte assumed sovereignty as President of this renamed Italian Republic.¹³

There is a strong sense of resentment at such arbitrary behaviour in *The Times* over the winter of 1801 - 2. The newspaper claimed that the peace negotiations still dragging on at Amiens were threatened by Bonaparte's 'ambition and encroachments in Italy'.¹⁴ *The Times* sought to undermine the significance of this action by suggesting that it weakened rather than strengthened the First Consul's domestic power: he was, after all, a revolutionary ruler and there were still hopes that he might be replaced by the legitimate monarch.¹⁵ It noted that the move had not been popular with the French people, arguing that it insulted them by suggesting that their ruler was more interested in the sovereignty of the Italians.¹⁶

Not only did the annexations and interference in Italy represent a tangible threat to the negotiations, but it also generated an enormous amount of suspicion about whether Bonaparte could be trusted in the aftermath of any conclusion of a definitive peace. An event such as this one appeared to demonstrate that

¹² *The Times* 5355 Wednesday March 3, 1802.

¹³ Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, p. 239.

¹⁴ *The Times* 5349 Wednesday February 24, 1802.

¹⁵ *The Times* 5353 Monday March 1, 1802; *The Times* 5362 Thursday March 11, 1802.

¹⁶ *The Times* 5349 Wednesday February 24, 1802.

Bonaparte was not likely to be restrained by agreements of any kind, and that in nature he was little different to his revolutionary predecessors, who had felt little compunction in breaching diplomatic agreements and informal understandings. The Italian reorganisation seemed an uncomfortable example of the role France was to play in a post-Revolutionary war Europe, Bonaparte rearranging states to suit himself while the other states looked on in impotence. It was a message not missed by British newspapers; Bonaparte had abused the trust accorded to him at the first available opportunity.

There were definite limitations, however, to the expression of concern about these events. France and Britain were formally at peace from April 1802, and although the First Consul had demonstrated that he felt little compunction in making the preliminary peace subject to revision, it was hoped that this was the last incursion he would feel was necessary for the security of France.¹⁷ There were indications from the final phase of negotiations that this might not be the case, although *The Times* was reluctant to stress the point. It reminded its readers that although Lord Cornwallis had suggested the French exchange the island of Tobago as settlement, Bonaparte would not agree to any alienation of the territories of the Republic.¹⁸ This inflexibility might have struck a chord with readers, for whom the image of Bonaparte refusing to bargain with colonial possessions must have contrasted with the British willingness to bargain to gain a durable peace. But the issue had been settled; suspicions were not evidence that Bonaparte was about to embark on a policy of open expansion.

Although *The Times* relayed the same degree of information and commentary about events abroad to readers in 1802 as it had done during the

¹⁷ *The Times* 5365 Monday March 15, 1802; also *The Times* 5475 Thursday July 29, 1802.

¹⁸ *The Times* 5379 Wednesday March 31, 1802.

war, a measure of introspection and concentration on domestic affairs on the behalf of readers seems to have occurred. Attention was focused on the general election in the summer of 1802, and its accompanying controversies, notably the election of Sir Francis Burdett in Middlesex.¹⁹ Nonetheless, coverage of Bonaparte's activities and news from the Continent continued and would have found interested readers. The news seemed to indicate that the First Consul was assuming the role of arbiter of Europe in his relations with other states. Holland was cited as one state to which the First Consul's 'protection' was to be extended.²⁰ The geographical and economic hegemony which the treaty of Lunéville confirmed to France made such a role an easy one for Bonaparte to exercise, and *The Times* claimed that this was an echo of the policies of his revolutionary predecessors.²¹ Subdued concerns about France's relations with neighbouring states allowed the newspaper to argue that those who had supported the First Consul as an acceptable substitute for democratic revolutionism were being proven wrong. Monarchical form was not altering revolutionary substance; like all the other revolutionary rulers Bonaparte too found it difficult to resist the temptation to meddle in the affairs of his neighbours. The paper lamented that for so many years Great Britain's major rival had been removed from the securities provided by legitimate monarchical government,

either by fugitive and provisional governments, upon whose permanence there was still less reason to rely than upon their sincerity; or at last, by the present military Constitution, which reduces the national will, sentiment, and engagements to the unknown design and private arbitrement of a private bosom.²²

¹⁹ Clive Emsley *British Society and the French Wars 1793 - 1815* (London, 1979), p. 94.

²⁰ *The Times* 5347 Monday February 22, 1802.

²¹ *The Times* 5424 Monday May 24, 1802.

²² *The Times* 5475 Thursday July 29, 1802.

The state of peace was depicted as precarious not simply because it depended on the actions of a single individual. Previous peace settlements with France had depended on the honour of the French king not to repudiate the agreement at will purely on the grounds of self-interest. No, *The Times* argued, the peace was insecure because the revolutionary ruler of France was not bound by the traditions and conventions of civilised intercourse between states. 'It is upon the good-faith of BONAPARTE, not that of *France*, that the peace reposes, and that any peace must repose which is concluded with an absolute Monarch and a Nation of soldiers,' the paper claimed. The alienness and untrustworthiness of a revolutionary and military government were invoked as reasons why the peace was less secure than it would be with a France with a legitimate government.²³

Intervention and manipulation along these lines could take many forms. The belief that Bonaparte as revolutionary ruler was fundamentally either unable or unwilling to abide by the laws of the nations seemed to be confirmed by the erratic and irresponsible behaviour of the official journal of the French government, *Le Moniteur*. Through its calumnies both of Great Britain and the other states of Europe, the journal was regarded as flouting the convention that diplomatic disagreements were not aired in public. With a tartness which suggests a response to attack from the journal in question, *The Times* claimed in August that *Le Moniteur*, inseparable from Bonaparte because of his domination of the French state, was a vehicle through which the Consular government threatened other states and attempted to dictate their behaviour. The paper quoted criticisms of the British freedom of the press and his manipulation of the late Czar of Russia as evidence that Bonaparte was attempting to enforce his own will on other states.²⁴ Readers were reminded that according to the accepted laws

²³ *ibid.*

of nations, the expression of legitimate concerns between states should be restricted to the official secret channels, to avoid unnecessary humiliation and embarrassment.²⁵

Revolutionism was given as the reason for this behaviour. Attacking the governments of other states was a way of distracting attention from the illegitimacy of Bonaparte's own regime. Britain, *The Times* stated confidently, had no need for such behaviour:

whether the English Government be or be not as firmly established as the testamentary Monarchy of the French Republic, it is certain that it has no necessity of diverting attention from its own title or practice, and sustaining its tottering state by an eternal succession of ambitious and rancorous wars.²⁶

The twofold message was clear. Like the office and behaviour of its master, the French official journal was a hybrid creation attempting to communicate with the other states of Europe. But because of its revolutionary nature, it was intrinsically unable to succeed. Moreover, its intemperate outbursts were alienating attempts by legitimate states to co-exist with France. Bonaparte's attempts to regulate communication between states, and his failure to recognise and obey the laws of the nations, were a regrettable demonstration of the inherent deficiencies of revolutionary states.

²⁴ Here characterised as 'the unfortunate Paul', his assassination a year previously depriving him of the abuse he had been subjected to in this newspaper during his reign: *The Times* 5491 Tuesday August 17, 1802.

²⁵ *The Times* 5493 Thursday August 19, 1802.

²⁶ *The Times* 5491 Tuesday August 17, 1802.

The reader will have noticed the reliance of the preceding paragraphs on arguments presented by *The Times*. Previous chapters have demonstrated that this newspaper persistently favoured the restoration of the legitimate monarchy in France, arguments the discussion above reveals to have also coloured its consideration of Bonaparte in this period. Thus it is probably inaccurate to cite the content of *The Times* as conclusive evidence that there were few attempts to come to terms with Bonaparte and France during the Peace of Amiens. There are tantalising hints in other publications that some commentators were struggling with the issue. One writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* wondered whether the laws of the nations should be modified to take account of the revolutionary nature of France, using the First Consul's attempts to bring the republics of Genoa and Venice more firmly under direct French influence as a template for his study. He argued that even if the war had altered the nature of European governments in favour of republican regimes, Bonaparte's behaviour was still unacceptable by any standards which could be considered reasonable. 'The destruction of a republic neutral in name, but in effect a dependent and obedient ally, is, in one act, a subversion of the new and old principles together'.²⁷ The First Consul seemed as little inclined to conform to any new system regulating relations between states as to the established laws of diplomatic intercourse.

A new group of valuable sources enters this study at this point. The Peace of Amiens offered a new stage in potential British views of Bonaparte: the opportunity for those who could only previously have read about the man to see and meet him for themselves. The British tradition of continental travel had been proscribed for nearly a decade.²⁸ In an age without photographs, the desire to see

²⁷ Review of *A Letter to **** Esq. on Bonaparte's Proposals for opening a Negotiation for Peace; in which the British Guarantee of the Crown of France to the House of Bourbon, contained in the Triple and Quadruple Alliances, and renewed by the Treaty of the Year 1783, is considered; together with the Conduct of our National Parties relating to it.* by J. Brand in *Gentleman's Magazine* for July 1802, p. 647.

Bonaparte and post-war France among those with the ability to travel was obviously strong. A cross-Channel rush followed the resumption of the regular mail packets between Britain and France on 18 November 1801, although Britons had begun to visit France not long after the suspension of hostilities in March of that year.²⁹ Much of the British aristocracy, including opposition leader Charles James Fox and his nephew Lord Holland, were included among these thousands of visitors. (Fox, who ostensibly visited Paris in the autumn of 1802 with his newly-acknowledged wife to research a book he was writing on James II, was subjected to criticism from *The Times* over what it regarded as his adulation of the First Consul.)³⁰ Paris offered attractions aside from the opportunity to see and meet Bonaparte. The great art treasures of Europe, looted and placed on display in the museums and art galleries, were now open free of charge to the public, for example.³¹

MacCunn poses an extremely important question when he asks of the British visitors to France during the Peace of Amiens: 'How far did their impressions tend to confirm the views of Bonaparte and his Government, previously entertained in England?'³² MacCunn argues that the unleashing of

²⁸ John Goldsworth Alger *Napoleon's British Visitors and Captives 1801 - 1815* (London, 1904, reprinted New York, 1970), p. 17. Alger's work is less useful than it might seem, because although he includes very detailed lists of those who were detained and the conditions in which they were kept, there is little on what they thought about their host.

²⁹ Alger, *Napoleon's British Visitors and Captives*, pp. 23 - 26, and Carola Oman *Britain against Napoleon* (London, 1942), p. 130.

³⁰ Alger, *Napoleon's British Visitors and Captives*, p. 34, Ashton, *The Dawn of the XIXth Century in England*, pp. 52 - 53, and Oman, *Britain against Napoleon*, p. 146; for commentary and criticism of Fox's visit, see *The Times* 5509 Wednesday September 8, 1802; *The Leeds Mercury and General Advertiser* 1848 October 2, 1802; *Leeds Mercury* 1850 October 16, 1802; *The Times* 5563 Thursday November 11, 1802.

³¹ Elizabeth Mavor (ed.) *The Grand Tours of Katherine Wilmot. France 1801 - 3 and Russia 1805 - 7* (London, 1992), p. 4.

³² MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, p. 48.

British visitors into France from late 1801 until the spring of 1803 had little impact on the nature of British opinions about Napoleon Bonaparte.³³ This seems remarkably unlikely. John Alger claims that British ambassador Lord Whitworth would not receive some pro-Bonapartist visitors because it was felt that they would convey the impression to the French government that there was a strong pro-French party within Great Britain.³⁴ Many British visitors were impressed with what they saw, and many were not; it is almost certain that at least some of those who visited France changed their opinions of the man. These impressions would have been transmitted to a wider audience upon their return home, both through word of mouth and the publication of their accounts, although much of this process would have occurred in the years which follow the conclusion of this study.

One such visitor whose recorded impressions are available for study was Bertie Greatheed, a middle-aged man from near Warwick who arrived in Paris with his wife and son in December 1802. The Greatheed family had connections with parliamentary Whigs and the sugar interest, Greatheed having been raised by his uncle, the fifth and last Duke of Ancaster. Their journey was undertaken so that the younger Greatheed could study the great works of art now on display in Paris.³⁵ The family were rather unusual among the thousands of British visitors because of their personal connections with the most prominent figures of the Consulate, including General Berthier and Bonaparte's mother; Bertie *fills* even sketched the First Consul personally. The Greatheeds remained in France after the resumption of war in May 1803, removing eventually to Germany and then to Italy.³⁶ Another visitor was the Irish noblewoman Katherine Wilmot,

³³ *ibid.*, p. 56.

³⁴ Alger, *Napoleon's British Visitors and Captives*, p. 162.

³⁵ Bertie Greatheed (1759 - 1826): J. P. T. Bury and J. C. Barry (eds.) *An Englishman in Paris: 1803. The Diary of BERTIE GREATHEED* (London, 1953), ix - xii.

from Glanmire, near Cork. She journeyed from Ireland to London with her friends Lord and Lady Cashell and their daughters in the autumn of 1801. The party had originally intended to embark on a tour of Great Britain, but diverted to the continent when they learned of the conclusion of peace preliminaries. Katherine was in her twenties at the time of her tour of France. Elizabeth Mavor, the editor of a collection of her letters, claims that Katherine Wilmot was a well-educated, broadminded and uncensorious woman, but notes that her choice of topics and expression were probably restricted by the fact that she was writing to her lawyer brother.³⁷ The final source of visitor opinion is that of the painter and diarist James Farington, who visited Paris between August and October 1802 and who met the First Consul on several occasions.³⁸

Fairly naturally, many of these visitors were more interested in Bonaparte the individual than the diplomatic and political issues which dominated the newspapers at home. Katherine Wilmot dined at the Tuileries in June 1802. She described the First Consul as being polite in conversation, ' " his air, tho' reserv'd, announcing everything of the polish'd gentleman," ' but noted that the reception was a strange mixture of old and new conventions: Bonaparte adhering to the traditional royal prerogative by walking out of the room first, but sitting down to dinner without regard to place.³⁹ Pushing through the crowd outside the palace in September to see the Consul passing on his horse, James Farington

³⁶ *ibid.*, Introduction, xvi - xviii.

³⁷ Elizabeth Mavor (ed.) *The Grand Tours of Katherine Wilmot*, Introduction, xi - xiii, pp. 1 - 2. Katherine Wilmot also toured Rome, Italy and Naples and went on an extensive tour of Russia from 1805 - 7. She moved to France for reasons of health, living initially at Moulins and then in Paris where she died of a lung condition in 1824 (p. 176).

³⁸ Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre (eds.) *The Diary of Joseph Farington* vol. V, August 1801 - March 1803 (New Haven and London, 1979).

³⁹ *The Grand Tours of Katherine Wilmot* Dimanche prairial 30me/Sunday June 19, 1802, p. 39.

thought he had an intent look and confident expression. The artist noted that Bonaparte's simple dress contrasted with the splendour of the parade, 'which gave him additional consequence, for the power & splendour of his situation was marked by the Contrast, as commanding all that brilliant display.'⁴⁰

As well as their opinions about Bonaparte the man, British visitors were not backward in recording their impressions of the changes which had been wrought on France since the early days of the Revolution. Farington's view was an optimistic one, that the French were changing rapidly from being a gloomy and savage people to one whose nature was that of cheerfulness and civility.⁴¹ He also described a conversation he had with a man named Cade, who had been at Havre when the First Consul had attended a public ball there. Farington noted Cade's comment that the inhabitants believed that Bonaparte on the throne gave them security and order.⁴² Many accounts stressed that the regime was a military one, a perception probably aided by Bonaparte's frequent personal appearances at reviews, inevitably accompanied by soldiers. These reports were not necessarily expressed in negative terms; Katherine Wilmot was very impressed by a review outside the Tuileries, stating that ' "the entire spectacle was extremely brilliant and I was more gratified than I ever was by a warlike pageant in all my life," ' and Bertie Greatheed echoed these sentiments in his description of another such review.⁴³ Glamour and spectacle clearly played a large part in the formation of opinions about Bonaparte among some of those who saw him in person.

⁴⁰ *Farington Diary* Thursday September 2, 1802, p. 1821.

⁴¹ *Farington Dairy* Sunday September 5, 1802, p. 1829.

⁴² *Farington Diary* Monday December 27, 1802, p. 1953.

⁴³ *The Grand Tours of Katherine Wilmot* Dimanche pluviôse 11me 1802/Sunday January 31, 1802, p. 24; *The Diary of Bertie Greatheed* Sunday April 3, 1803, pp. 114 - 115.

Others were less dazzled by spectacle, and more willing to look for and find France under Bonaparte as a repressive military state. In May 1802, some five months before his own visit, James Farington encountered a man named Smith, who was convinced that Consular government resembled that of the Praetorian bands in ancient Rome, with military power aweing the population into submission.⁴⁴ The diarist's suspicions were confirmed during his own visit in the autumn. He noticed a military presence everywhere, even at a fête at the Tivoli Gardens, and observed that visitors to the Louvre were only allowed in and out through two guarded gates. ' "The *Civil power* is not distinguishable in Paris. It is the Musket & bayonet that settles all differences," ' Farington recorded in his diary on 19 September, and he returned to the theme on several other occasions.⁴⁵ Bertie Greatheed, too, wondered whether the price of stability under Bonaparte had been too great for a people to abandon their hard-won liberty, and expressed his family's concern about being spied upon.⁴⁶

Viewing and meeting Bonaparte in person allowed the visitor to investigate common beliefs about the man for themselves, sometimes with interesting results. James Farington did not think that Bonaparte lived in a state of perpetual fear (as some newspapers in Britain often stated), because he allowed those with petitions to approach him in person. One of his impressions was that rather than enjoying the numerous inspections of troops which dominated French public life, Bonaparte appeared to be bored and indifferent with the activity: 'It was more like a Man waiting for a ceremony to be over which occupied little of his regard.'⁴⁷ The connection between the First Consul and the military state was

⁴⁴ *Farington Diary* Friday May 14, 1802, p. 1778.

⁴⁵ *Farington Diary* Sunday September 19, 1802, p. 1861; Wednesday September 22, 1802, p. 1870.

⁴⁶ *The Diary of Bertie Greatheed* Wednesday January 26, 1803, p. 37.

⁴⁷ *Farington Diary* Thursday October 7, 1802, pp. 1905 - 1906.

not as straightforward for contemporaries as newspaper coverage would suggest. Those with the opportunity to see and meet Bonaparte for themselves were provided with ways to modify the assumptions with which they had arrived.

British commentators and visitors remained aware of Bonaparte's manipulation of French domestic opinion through institutions, notably that of religion. The major development in this period was the conclusion of the Concordat between the Consulate and the Pope in the spring of 1802, after over a year of haggling and several near-breakdowns.⁴⁸ The significance of this agreement was not lost on contemporaries. It was not for nothing that its conclusion was described by *The Times* (albeit with a measure of journalistic hyperbole) as forming 'one of the most memorable epochs that ever occurred in the annals of the Christian Religion.'⁴⁹ The Pope, the religious leader of most of Europe, had accepted the First Consul as the legitimate ruler of France, and the Consular regime was to be accorded the same treatment by the Papacy as the states of the *ancien régime*. This would be a major stimulus for the reconciliation of the Consulate to the Roman Catholic states of Europe; in one very considerable way the atheistic revolutionary nation was seen as attempting to return to the fold of legitimate states.

Naturally the British were especially interested in the relationship between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism in the new French religious polity. The general conclusion was that although the toleration of Protestant worship was an apparently enlightened step, both the restoration of religion and this toleration were being undertaken for reasons of political expediency. They were an attempt by a ruler of indifferent personal beliefs to reconcile the

⁴⁸ For details of the negotiations between France and the Papacy, see William Doyle *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 385 - 390.

⁴⁹ *The Times* 5388 Monday April 12, 1802.

maximum number of his subjects to his regime, a sop to distract the attention of the French people from the autocratic nature of their government.⁵⁰ The arrangements were decidedly in the favour of the French state; it must have seemed obvious that the restoration was motivated by politics rather than conscience. *The Times* described a grand dinner given by Talleyrand as proof of how the government wished to be associated with the benefits which would accrue from the revival of legitimate religious worship.⁵¹ It is this period which marks the frequent expression of the assumption that Bonaparte's religious beliefs were those of convenience - a belief stimulated by the publication of various detailed accounts of the Egyptian expedition and the circulation of stories about Bonaparte's cruel behaviour.⁵² *The Times* claimed in one anecdote that relations between France and the Dey of Tunis were good because both rulers shared the same religion.⁵³ It would have been a short step from commenting satirically on the flexible nature of Bonaparte's own religious beliefs to seeing his active role in the restoration of religion as politically motivated.

The discussion of the religious question also threw up other interesting elements. The traditional British antipathy for Catholicism and papal influence is unsurprisingly present, Bonaparte on one occasion being described as a figure 'whom God has raised up and filled with zeal against the errors of the Popish communion.'⁵⁴ Katherine Wilmot witnessed in Paris the official celebrations for

⁵⁰ *The Times* 5277 Tuesday December 1, 1801.

⁵¹ *The Times* 5397 Thursday April 22, 1802.

⁵² Review of *History of the British Expedition to Egypt* in *Gentleman's Magazine* for December 1802, pp. 1121 - 1130. Historians have regarded this pamphlet as the seminal example of British views of Bonaparte; the relatively late date at which this influential pamphlet was in circulation is a further indication that stories of cruelty and poisonings belong to this period, and that which followed, rather than to that of the expedition itself.

⁵³ *The Times* 5397 Thursday April 22, 1802.

⁵⁴ *Leeds Mercury* 1854 November 13, 1802. This point is recognised by Cottrell in 'English views of France and the French', p. 229.

the re-establishment of Roman Catholicism, and lamented the revival of the old religion as a support for the new regime, commenting that the bishops:

"gave me the notion of fell enchanters, who through the witchery of their spells and necromancy caused a resurrection of the departed spirit of the Roman Catholick religion, as a new species of passtime to Bonaparte the king, and made the phantom flit before his eyes in all the changes of the gaudiest pageantry."⁵⁵

The commentary in these months seems to have moved on from the belief in 1800 - 1 that Bonaparte was restoring pre-revolutionary institutions to buttress his position in the French government, to one that they were to be used to support his autocratic rule, a subtle yet significant distinction.⁵⁶ The issue was also linked to questions of the First Consul's wider trustworthiness. One writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* argued that if Bonaparte's endorsement of religion was motivated by politics, then there was little reason to believe in his belief in other traditional European understandings such as adherence to treaties.⁵⁷ Information and assumptions generated by knowledge of previous events in Bonaparte's career, in this case, the Egyptian expedition were now proving important in determining reactions to new events. If it was believed that Bonaparte had demonstrated manipulative behaviour in Egypt, it could be argued that all his actions had similar motives.

The militaristic nature of Bonaparte's domestic rule also remained a prominent theme in the newspapers at home. 'General Bonaparte' remained an alternative title for the First Consul in *The Times*.⁵⁸ The membership of the

⁵⁵ *The Grand Tours of Katherine Wilmot* Dimanche floréal 5me/Sunday April 25, 1802, pp. 33 - 34.

⁵⁶ *Leeds Mercury* 1854 November 13, 1802.

⁵⁷ Review of *A Letter to *****, Esq. on Bonaparte's *Proposals for opening a Negotiation for Peace*;... in *Gentleman's Magazine* for July 1802, p. 648.

Corps Diplomatiques, now staffed by generals, was regarded as a prime example of the military influence which had permeated French society and government in the two and half years in which the First Consul had exercised power.⁵⁹ Military power was seen as the basis for the day-to-day government of France, with the threat of forcible repression hanging over every event.⁶⁰ It was noted that the *Te Deum* held at Nôtre Dame for the formal restoration of the Roman Catholic Church was attended by four battalions of soldiers, while the laity were excluded from the ceremony. 'Although *Peace* be established, the FIRST CONSUL seems determined not to part with the "pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious *War*,"' *The Times* stated. The strong implication was that regardless of the event or the international conditions the First Consul was unable to give up his passion for things military and his need to cultivate the support of the army.⁶¹ *The Times* also lamented the anxiety and expenditure forced upon other states by the presence of a revolutionary military regime in their midst, although it was careful to disclaim the need for concern about any impending return to war.⁶²

The belief that Bonaparte alone dominated the lives of the French became a central assumption in this period, building on the foundations which had been laid and nurtured in the aftermath of the coup of *Brumaire* two years previously. The existence of a formal constitution was regarded as being of little significance. Recent French history was filled with examples of regimes ignoring or actively conspiring to subvert their grand constitutions. 'The Constitution is

⁵⁸ For example *The Times* 5306 Monday January 4, 1802.

⁵⁹ *The Times* 5462 Wednesday July 14, 1802; *The Times* 5474 Wednesday July 28, 1802.

⁶⁰ *The Times* 5372 Tuesday March 23, 1802.

⁶¹ *The Times* 5397 Thursday April 22, 1802 (quotation); *The Times* 5400 Monday April 26, 1802.

⁶² *The Times* 5475 Thursday July 29, 1802.

at the Thuilleries - the *initiative* of every measure is in the Chief Consul,' commented *The Times* in January 1802.⁶³ What mattered was Bonaparte, and more especially, his physical presence. In a fashion which increasingly resembled the French kings of old, politics in France appeared to revolve around the person of the Consul. Political life was described as ending when he left the capital.⁶⁴ The obvious emergence of an energetic, quasi-monarchical government prompted derisive comments about the ostensibly representative institutions. The activity of the executive, combined with their careful proscription under the constitution, led the Legislature and the Tribunal to be described as redundant organs of government. James Farington noted after his visit to the Legislative Assembly in Paris in September 1802 that all it was allowed to do was to hear and vote legislation, and that there was no debating. It was ' "all dumb shew, as far as the Deputies are concerned." '65 This was made clear to the reader in *The Times'* coverage of their participation in the peacemaking process; the legislative bodies had found in their acceptance of the peace preliminaries a 'momentary importance', the newspaper claimed in December 1801. The role of the legislative bodies in domestic reconstruction was a clever feint on Bonaparte's behalf, a means of distracting the attention of members from their redundancy.⁶⁶

British conceptions of the relationship between Bonaparte and the French people in this period were dominated by monarchism. Commentators were aware that the First Consul was channelling political loyalty to himself rather than to the Revolution, and grafting further monarchist elements on to what was already

⁶³ *The Times* 5313 Tuesday January 12, 1802.

⁶⁴ *The Times* 5330 Monday February 1, 1802.

⁶⁵ *Farington Diary* Sunday September 19, 1802, p. 1859.

⁶⁶ *The Times* 5277 Tuesday December 1, 1801; *The Times* 5282 Monday December 7, 1801 (quotation).

a strangely hybrid regime. Rather than the state-run festivals of the 1790s, which had directed loyalty to the Revolution itself, the Consulate's activities were celebrating the existence of the First Consul. Thus Bonaparte became the 'Majestic Unit' of the French state, in the words of *The Times*,⁶⁷ while the newspaper pointed to the restoration of royal symbolism through grand state banquets and the elaborately liveried retinues of the Consular footmen as evidence of his pretensions to royal status.⁶⁸ Comparisons began to be made between the First Consul and the pre-revolutionary French kings. The presentation of the Regent Diamond of Louis XV to the First Consul in November 1801 offered one such opportunity.⁶⁹ These trends were regarded as a foretaste of impending constitutional change. The first indications that such change was in the offing were reported in March 1802, significantly before the completion of the final negotiations at Amiens. *The Times* reported that Bonaparte was to become Chief Magistrate and sole Consul, with the subsidiary Consuls being drafted into a Conservative Senate. The effective abolition of the ten-day republican calendar through the ordering of government officers to rest every seven days was also noted as part of the retreat from revolutionism.⁷⁰ This was the first indication that Bonaparte was overtly attempting to modify the constitution of December 1799. It seems to have strengthened suspicions about Bonaparte's ability or desire to co-exist with the other states of Europe, coming so soon after the news of his unwarranted intervention in the Italian states.

⁶⁷ *The Times* 5514 Tuesday September 14, 1802.

⁶⁸ *The Times* 5521 Wednesday September 22, 1802 (banquet), *The Times* 5407 Tuesday May 4, 1802 (footmen); see also *Farington Diary* Friday May 14, 1802, p. 1778.

⁶⁹ *The Times* 5260 Wednesday November 11, 1801, and *The Times* 5267 Thursday November 19, 1801.

⁷⁰ *The Times* 5377 Monday March 29, 1802.

There were two events within France which attracted British attention in the summer of 1802, and which inspired concern that Bonaparte's restless activities on the international stage had a domestic equivalent. The establishment of the Legion of Honour indicated a distinct shift towards vesting loyalty and sovereignty in the person of the First Consul rather than in the revolutionary state. Through the implementation of a system of rewards which in many respects mirrored those of the *anciens régimes*, France was seen as taking a step away from democratic sovereignty and towards an aristocratic system, albeit an aristocracy of merit open to all classes. John A. Lynn has argued that 'Napoleon encouraged the personal interest of the soldier and strived to link it to that of the Empire by a system of awards and preferments.'⁷¹ British newspapers were more interested in the political and ideological consequences of the event than its military significance.⁷² They believed that the Legion of Honour was part of the Consul's drive to encourage loyalty to himself. Elitism was being created in what was still officially a revolutionary state. *The Times* noted that an administrative body had been elected to supervise the Legion, and that this had attracted opposition from the democratic republicans of Paris.⁷³ The implications of this were self-evident: the construction of an unlimited pseudo-monarchy in France was being supplemented by an extra-constitutional organ which owed allegiance only to the monarchical part of the government. As Lynn notes, in the eighteenth century honour was 'an aristocratic sentiment vital to the functioning of monarchy',⁷⁴ and the creation of the Legion of Honour was believed to be evidence

⁷¹ John A. Lynn 'Towards an Army of Honor: The Moral Evolution of the French Army, 1789 - 1815', *French Historical Studies* 16, 1, Spring 1989, p. 153.

⁷² J. E. Cookson discusses in detail the responses generated by the high profile inaugural presentation in 1804 in the 'Armed Nationalism' chapter of *The British Armed Nation, 1793 - 1815* (unpublished MSS, 1995). I am grateful to Dr. Cookson for allowing me to consult his work in progress.

⁷³ *The Times* 5458 Friday July 9, 1802.

⁷⁴ Lynn, 'Towards an Army of Honor', p. 154.

that Bonaparte regarded himself rather than the revolutionary state as being sovereign.

The other internal event in France in the summer of 1802 produced an unprecedented amount of comment in *The Times*. In May the paper suggested that the settlement of an hereditary succession on Bonaparte was soon to be an important issue.⁷⁵ At first this change did not seem unduly worrying. Bonaparte would fulfil his ambition to be confirmed in office for life. But later reports suggested that an hereditary succession was to be settled on Bonaparte and his heirs. This was quite a different matter: the prospect became one of perpetual military rule in France. It was with these concerns in mind that *The Times* analysed the voting, which took place between May and July. The paper noted on 26 May that the first military division near Paris had voted unanimously in favour of the proposal to make Bonaparte Consul for life - a piece of news which would not have diminished reader awareness of the connection between Bonaparte's desire for unrestricted personal rule and the belief that the Consulate was anchored in military support.⁷⁶ Readers would also have been aware that the measure did not have universal support within France. *The Times* reported in June that addresses were pouring in from the provincial departments, congratulating Bonaparte on his conclusion of peace and restoration of religion. Among these a few also expressed their support for the establishment of the life consulship.⁷⁷

The implication that revolutionary sentiment against the creation of an hereditary monarchical government remained widespread among the French people had the obvious corollary that the issue was seen as Bonaparte's personal

⁷⁵ *The Times* 5414 Wednesday May 12, 1802.

⁷⁶ *The Times* 5426 Wednesday May 26, 1802; *The Times* 5448 Monday June 21, 1802.

⁷⁷ *The Times* 5433 Thursday June 3, 1802.

agendum. *The Times* stated in July that the fulfilment of the ambitions of the First Consul should be regarded as a foregone conclusion, regardless of the fact that the representative bodies were yet to signify their consent.⁷⁸ Given the nature of events over the previous two and a half years, this was an entirely understandable assumption. One of the most interesting things about the British commentary on the life consulship is how removed Bonaparte as an individual was from the centre of the discussion. It was assumed that he was behind it all, assumed that the votes were being manipulated at his behest. There was a fundamental belief by this point that any constitutional change in France was of his making. This was surely influenced by the frequent pronouncements that the First Consul was the centre of all political activity, and that little occurred without his explicit consent. The beginnings of Bonaparte's semi-mythical status can be clearly identified in assumptions such as these.

Although *The Times* was sure that Bonaparte would be able to confirm himself in the life consulship with little opposition, it was less certain that he would gain unopposed the right to name his successor. The revival of the hereditary principle in the French government was an issue which democratic republicans would surely oppose, and the paper began to consider the implications of Bonaparte's assumption of the life consulship without the hereditary succession. The question of stability would move from Bonaparte himself to the office of Consul.⁷⁹ Fears of perpetual military rule in the Bonaparte family would be assuaged if the Consul's plans to assume the hereditary principle did not come to fruition. Bonaparte's tenure in office would be limited: to his lifetime, it was true, but this was preferable to an apeing of legitimate dynastic tradition.

⁷⁸ *The Times* 5460 Monday July 12, 1802.

⁷⁹ *The Times* 5438 Wednesday June 9, 1802.

The news that the First Consul had overridden the feeble opposition and achieved both goals was received in the second week of August. It generated a sustained barrage of concerned commentary from *The Times*, which questioned not only consequences of the event for France but also for the state of peace in wider Europe.⁸⁰ The newspaper claimed that those who had voted for the measure had betrayed the legacy of the Revolution, claiming that at least those who had offered the crown to Cromwell had not been supporters of Charles I.⁸¹ It reproduced in detail the address given by Barthelmi, President of the Conservative Senate, to the crowd assembled at the Tuileries. The speech was derisively described as being a 'durable monument of the happy pliability of his principles under every circumstance and change', while *The Times* lamented especially the lack of questioning about any limits to this new constitutional authority. France was to have no relief from an oppressive military government; instead it had concurred to the unopposed will of a military ruler.⁸²

The First Consul was now the most powerful ruler in the history of France, possibly even of Europe. He possessed the authority to appoint and dismiss at will all major national and provincial officials including the electoral college presidents and mayors in the municipal councils, and alone had the power to declare war and make peace. *The Times* believed that the assumption of the life consulship had shifted France from being a revolutionary state with an executive dominated by one man to a military despotism, still underscored by the alien uncertainties of revolutionism with all its connotations of historical groundlessness.⁸³ France was depicted as a state with no grounding in tradition

⁸⁰ *The Times* 5484 Monday August 9, 1802; *The Times* 5486 Wednesday August 11, 1802 and *The Times* 5491 Tuesday August 17, 1802.

⁸¹ *The Times* 5484 Monday August 9, 1802.

⁸² *ibid.* (quotation); *The Times* 5486 Wednesday August 11, 1802; see also *Leeds Mercury* 1848 October 2, 1802.

⁸³ *The Times* 5486 Wednesday August 11, 1802.

and historical experience which might restrain both the ambitions and practices of a ruler willing and able to exploit his circumstances. Without representative bodies with some power and the tradition of freedom under the law, *The Times* argued, France had effectively been delivered to a man who could make policy based on his unbridled personal desires. That this was dressed up in fine language about fundamental laws and plans for organic consultative bodies (which were responsible only for general laws rather than official policy) did not alter this fact.⁸⁴ And the consequences for the surrounding states was also invoked as an important issue. The constitutional confirmation of an unlimited revolutionary monarch ruling the dominant state in Western Europe threatened the security of all of France's neighbours; *The Times* informed readers that the balance of Europe was threatened by the creation of an unlimited military state in its midst.⁸⁵

The virulence of the initial reaction to these events is clear evidence of British concern. Certainly some of the language used can only be charitably described as intemperate, *The Times* labelling the new French government on one occasion as 'the present unqualified form of White-Slavery'.⁸⁶ But the issues raised had to be subsumed into a cautious concern. The British press realised that they had to accept that Bonaparte was now Consul for life, and attempt to find a way of incorporating this into reporting and commentary without causing offence to a state with which Britain was at peace. It is here that the reactive rather than active role of newspapers as a medium is clearly illustrated. *The Times* was able and willing to express its concerns about the effect this latest development would have on the existence of the French people. It also raised concerns about the international consequences of Bonaparte's new powers. But

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ *The Times* 5493 Thursday August 19, 1802.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

the newspaper was also aware that the British ministers did not regard internal changes in France as a *casus belli*. Although Bonaparte might be making his neighbours edgy about the prospect of continued peace, co-exist they must. Thus there were tentative attempts to see the changes as less threatening than they at first appeared. Having allocated himself an unopposed civil power in France, *The Times* hoped that the First Consul might settle down and consolidate his power without risking the peace. 'He has made his Republic so like a camp, that he has little to gain by changing Paris for the field, and for his sceptre the *Baton*.'⁸⁷ Recognition of the new French pseudo-monarchy began to be included in the reporting and commentary, although often with a distinctly ironical edge. *The Times* noted in December that the Court Calendar had listed the First Consul among the sovereigns of Europe: 'in the current specification of each Monarch's birth, &c. states that he was born on the 15th of August 1769, and "began to reign" the 15th of December 1799.'⁸⁸ In the late summer of 1802 it remained to be seen how this constitutional change would affect France's behaviour towards other states. Over the next nine months, the trust which had been extended to Bonaparte was to be progressively undermined. A series of events indicated that the Consul was more interested in using his new power to make relations between European states, and even in some cases within them, dependent on his authority.

Historians have cited the First Consul's prosecution of French journalist Jean Peltier as an example of British concern that Bonaparte was attempting to suppress freedom of speech. Peltier, the editor of the anti-Bonapartist journal *L'Ambigu*, was resident in Great Britain. This has been seen as an example of British concerns over Bonaparte's attempt to interfere with their cherished

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ *The Times* 5597 Tuesday December 21, 1802.

liberties.⁸⁹ This issue did not figure significantly in *The Times*. The paper noted in the late summer that the French government was insisting on prosecution,⁹⁰ and made the odd comment on the issue over the following months,⁹¹ but the issue was not dwelt upon at any length. Nor did the substantial reorganisation of the German states undertaken by France and Russia in 1802 attract much interest. In October *The Times* stated rather anxiously that it felt that readers were not paying enough attention to the events occurring at the Diet of Ratisbon, and claimed that genuine sovereigns should be affronted by the unnatural connection between the legitimate and the revolutionary rulers. Once again the First Consul was attempting to manipulate the affairs of his neighbours for his own reasons, and *The Times* expressed dissatisfaction that the Austrian Emperor had been subjected to 'the unjust and insolent dictates of the First Consul'.⁹² This seemed direct evidence to the paper that boundaries between the revolutionary Consul and the legitimate monarchs of Europe were being blurred.⁹³ The issue of legitimacy was one which *The Times* raised at every available opportunity, but the minimal amount of coverage accorded the German issue does seem to confirm Schroeder's comment that the British paid little attention to French interference in Germany, and that this was not a major reason for the return to war in the spring of 1803.⁹⁴

From the autumn of 1802 the British ministry attempted to negotiate a workable relationship with France which adhered to the spirit of the Amiens

⁸⁹ MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, pp. 62 - 63; Ben-Israel, *English Historians on the French Revolution*, p. 37.

⁹⁰ *The Times* 5502 Tuesday August 31, 1802.

⁹¹ *The Times* 5656 Wednesday March 9, 1803.

⁹² *The Times* 5531 Monday October 4, 1802.

⁹³ *The Times* 5533 Wednesday October 6, 1802.

⁹⁴ Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, p. 238.

settlement. Addington and his ministers were stalling over the provision under which Great Britain would evacuate the island of Malta, because they were unable to trust the French not to simply occupy the island. In exchange for a demonstration of Bonaparte's good intentions, ministers offered to recognise officially the French client states, the Italian and Ligurian republics and the Kingdom of Etruria.⁹⁵ Schroeder argues that this illustrates a genuine desire to avoid a return to war, and claims that these attempts to re-negotiate a basis for peaceful co-existence with France ruled by an ascendant Bonaparte have gone largely unnoticed by historians. According to this argument, the ministers were not hostile to French hegemony in Western Europe; rather, through these negotiations they were trying to persuade Bonaparte to manage that hegemony in a different fashion.⁹⁶ This argument is one which has yet to be subjected to questioning and modification by other historians, but the model can be argued to have some relevance when considered in relation to the British press in this period. Newspapers were aware of the negotiations taking place between British ministers and French, although they were referred to only obliquely. That newspapers were making efforts not to provoke the First Consul unduly, and were exercising their prerogative of free speech with a measure of restraint, is illustrated by the degree of circumspection evident in their reporting and commentary on the events of the autumn and winter of 1802 - 3.

The most significant example of this came with the response to the military invasion launched into Switzerland by Bonaparte in the autumn of 1802. Switzerland had been an effective client state of France since the Directory had ordered the 'liberation' of the Swiss in 1798, an action with which Bonaparte had not been associated at the time.⁹⁷ By the spring of 1803 the French Act of

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 243.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 242 - 243.

⁹⁷ Bonnard, 'The Invasion of Switzerland and English Public Opinion'.

Mediation had confirmed Bonaparte as the effective arbiter of the destinies of the Swiss, and a consular-style constitution was imposed on the cantons.⁹⁸ Historians have rightly pointed to this direct interference as a major cause of hostility towards Bonaparte in Britain. Across the autumn and winter months of 1802 - 3 newspapers expressed their indignation at this action. The invasion of Switzerland significantly accelerated the distrust and suspicion which had been a feature of commentary to that point. Bonaparte was now seen to be resorting to military force to achieve his goals. The invasion demonstrated that the First Consul had not renounced the expansionist policies of his predecessors; Bonaparte's revolutionary monarchism was revealed to be equally as susceptible to self-aggrandisement as previous French regimes.⁹⁹ A new theme, that of Bonaparte as a man of insatiable ambition, began to feature in commentary as it had never done before.¹⁰⁰ Without the revolutionary democratic justification of the 'liberation' of other peoples, the invasion of Switzerland could be construed only as evidence of Bonaparte's appetite for power and his lack of qualms about openly flaunting the laws of the nations.

It is interesting that the Swiss invasion attracted much greater attention in British newspapers than did the surreptitious intervention among the German states. Probably indirect manipulation did not have the same stigma as open invasion, the former having at least the benefit of conforming to conventions of secret diplomacy and not involving the use of crude military force for diplomatic ends.¹⁰¹ Although Bonaparte's management of the French hegemony in Western Europe by stealth was now recognised as being supplemented by the open use of

⁹⁸ Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, pp. 232 - 233.

⁹⁹ *The Times* 5566 Monday November 15, 1802; *The Times* 5568 Wednesday November 17, 1802.

¹⁰⁰ For example *The Times* 5543 Monday October 18, 1802.

¹⁰¹ An idea suggested in Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, pp. 172 - 173.

force, newspapers were also aware that manipulation by stealth continued as a French diplomatic tool. Plans were announced in November for the transfer of Parma to France in a further reorganisation of the French client states in Italy,¹⁰² and several Italian states were allocated to the King of Spain.¹⁰³ At the same time the failure to abide by the laws of nations and persistence in interfering in the affairs of other states was regarded as firm evidence that, despite her military monarchist government, France under Bonaparte was still a state conditioned by revolutionism. *The Times* claimed that it was important for the security of Europe as well as for European civilisation that 'one lawless and unprincipled Government should not prolong and perpetuate a system of plunder and spoliation.' It was an interesting and subtly different position for *The Times*, the persistent if now understated champion of legitimacy, to take: legitimacy was denied to Bonapartist France because the revolutionary pseudo-monarchy was refusing to play by the rules of the legitimate monarchies.¹⁰⁴

The continuing need to remain on at least civil terms with the Consulate at a time of formal peace dictated that coverage was accorded a measure of discretion, even in the pages of the hostile *Times*. Thus direct criticism was often veiled through the use of coded terms such as 'military force' and governments 'fashioned on the French model'.¹⁰⁵ Bonaparte was not often mentioned directly in connection with the invasion, although the implication that he was responsible was never absent.¹⁰⁶ This circumspection illustrates that even as late as the winter of 1802 - 3 one of the most conservative of

¹⁰² *The Times* 5566 Monday November 15, 1802.

¹⁰³ *The Times* 5568 Wednesday November 17, 1802.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.* (quotation); *The Times* 5611 Thursday January 6, 1803.

¹⁰⁵ *The Times* 5526 Tuesday September 28, 1802.

¹⁰⁶ *The Times* 5507 Monday September 6, 1802; *The Times* 5531 Monday October 4, 1802; *The Times* 5568 Wednesday November 17, 1802.

newspapers was making efforts to avoid undue provocation. *The Times* was aware that barely a year had passed since the formal suspension of hostilities in the Revolutionary war and the jubilant reception of peace preliminaries in London, and that Britain and other states were still recovering from that conflict. The paper had stated in November 1801 that Britain had no place in opposing French interference in Holland and Switzerland alone, 'while all the mighty Potentates are dividing its spoils, and all the secondary States either absorbed in indemnities, or whirling around the axis of Revolution.'¹⁰⁷ A year later, it was not the role of Great Britain to declare war 'for the sake of such countries as are unable or unwilling to stand forward in their own rights, and most near and immediate interests.' European states ought to be protesting more loudly themselves about Bonaparte's encroachments. This was a none-too-subtle dig at what *The Times* regarded as the intransigence of Austria, Britain's traditional European ally.¹⁰⁸ Such an argument marked out a position within which the newspaper could express strong indignation at events in Europe, and urge the states which surrounded France to do the same, while reserving the right not to advocate formal British intercession and drawing back from open hostility.

Switzerland was not, however, the only issue prominent in British newspapers at this time. Stirrings about the French presence in the Mediterranean first occurred in the late summer of 1802. In August *The Times* stated that there were many pressures on British ministers because of the events which had occurred since the signing of the treaty of Amiens, and was sympathetic to the ministerial dilemma over whether or not to evacuate Malta.¹⁰⁹ This issue seems to have been temporarily eclipsed by concern in the autumn over the invasion of Switzerland. But over the winter and spring months

¹⁰⁷ *The Times* 5258 Monday November 9, 1801.

¹⁰⁸ *The Times* 5568 Wednesday November 17, 1802.

¹⁰⁹ *The Times* 5481 Tuesday August 5, 1802.

of 1802 - 3 the Malta question was accompanied by concern about indications that Bonaparte intended to increase French power in the Mediterranean and possibly recapture Egypt, thereby threatening British trade with India. Britain would also have been cut off from her traditional European ally, Austria, and from entry to any potential military campaign in Europe through Italy. These strategic issues were particularly important now that France controlled all of the Dutch coast, the traditional British entry point into Europe. The fact that British ministers were openly displaying their distrust of the First Consul encouraged the cautious expression of similar sentiments in the newspapers. *The Times* believed that French diplomatic agents in the East were working to undermine British influence, questioned why a French fleet had been despatched from Genoa into the area, and was extremely suspicious of the close relationship France was cultivating with the Turks, nominally the overlords of Egypt.¹¹⁰ In October the paper reiterated its support for the Addington ministry's attempt to renegotiate the provisions of the Treaty of Amiens as a result of these suspicions.¹¹¹

This issue assumed greater significance in early 1803. Newspapers were aware of a French expedition into the Mediterranean, conducted by one Colonel Sebastiani. The expedition's report, which was published in *Le Moniteur* for all the states of Europe to read, stated that it would be simple for France to recapture Egypt.¹¹² *The Times* treated this as a virtual statement of intent. It reminded readers that interference in Egypt had been prohibited under the terms of the treaty of Amiens. The continuing British presence in Malta was argued to be justified because Bonaparte had abrogated the spirit of the original settlement, and through his interference in other states had indicated that he had

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ *The Times* 5538 Tuesday October 12, 1802.

¹¹² Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*. p. 231.

no qualms about breaking the agreement in his own interest.¹¹³ Colonel Sebastiani's expedition was conceived as an attempt to dissuade the natives of Egypt against returning to Turkish suzerainty, and Sebastiani was believed to have assured the Egyptians that they would have French financial and military support for their independence once Britain had evacuated Malta. *The Times* vented its anger on Sebastiani, who was described as 'Commercial Agent, Spy, Ambassador, and Incendiary Extraordinary to every rebel in the Turkish provinces,'¹¹⁴ although once again the newspaper held back from overtly hostile criticism of the First Consul himself.

These arguments betray a sense of self-justification which must have been deemed necessary. After all, technically it was the British who was in the wrong through their failure to evacuate Malta. The attention paid to the Sebastiani expedition reflects contemporary fears that France was going to establish her dominance in the world through stealth while Britain, which did not share the First Consul's lack of qualms about disregarding formal agreements, would be alienated from trade and influence in regions such as the Mediterranean.¹¹⁵ The diplomatic deadlock over Malta was regarded as further evidence that Bonaparte would resort to subterfuge as a means of avoiding his obligations while demanding virtuously that Great Britain fulfil hers.¹¹⁶

Concerns about the uncontrolled nature of *Le Moniteur*, the official journal of the Bonaparte government, were raised again in January 1803. *The Times* reiterated many of the arguments which had featured several months previously,

¹¹³ *The Times* 5623 Thursday January 20, 1803; *The Times* 5636 Monday February 7, 1803.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *The Times* 5623 Thursday January 20, 1803; *The Times* 5636 Monday February 7, 1803; *The Times* 5684 Tuesday April 12, 1803.

notably the questioning about whether open criticism and humiliation of other governments was evidence of the inability of a revolutionary regime to communicate with legitimate states. The paper wondered whether these attacks were a self-justifying device, if the threatening of others was a way for the Consulate to reassure itself of its own security as the ultimate development of the Revolution.¹¹⁷ The criticism of domestic politics in neighbouring states particularly rankled with *The Times*: 'Is it *regular* to discuss, censure, and criticise the speeches of individual Senators, composing a small and inefficient minority in a foreign Legislature?' it queried.¹¹⁸ The newspaper informed its readers that the maintenance of peace would be impossible if one state persisted in undermining international relations by airing its grievances in public. On this occasion such behaviour was described as 'revolutionary attacks', illustrating the ideological currents still flowing beneath the surface of such discussions. The implication was that for all his attempts to establish himself as a monarchical ruler, the Consul's revolutionary origins prevented him from behaving in any reasonable fashion.¹¹⁹

The previous paragraphs have shown that the newspapers used in this chapter were profoundly suspicious of Bonaparte by the winter of 1802 - 3. Although some disillusionment had set in as a result of Bonaparte's interventions in Italy during the final peace negotiations in the spring of 1802, the fact that Britain and France were still at peace acted as a significant dampener on hostile commentary. While indignation and concern had been expressed at such events as Bonaparte's achievement of the life consulship, the interference in Germany, the attacks from *Le Moniteur* on the other states of Europe, and especially on the military invasion of Switzerland, a discernible note of circumspection still

¹¹⁷ *The Times* 5611 Thursday January 6, 1803.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

permeated the discussion. This had diminished by the early months of 1803, and there was an awareness that a return to war was a greater possibility than before. This should not be taken as evidence that a return to war was expected as early as January or February 1803. The commentary of these months does not seem markedly different in tone to that of the six months previously. Continuing, if muted, indignation was expressed about the state of affairs in Europe, and newspapers were aware of the continuing impasse between British ministers and Bonaparte's insistence on the evacuation of Malta. But at the same time, there are pessimistic undertones and small indications which suggest that newspapers were preparing their readers for a possible return to war.

The tone in British newspapers in March and April 1803 was one of pessimism and half-hearted drift. The King's speech to the Houses of Parliament was seen as an indication that the peace would probably not last for much longer; *The Times* claimed that it seemed superfluous

to prepare the minds of the people for any thing so daily expected as a cessation of the precarious and anxious truce, which, for nearly two years, our Government has been endeavouring to convert into a solid and permanent peace with the FIRST CONSUL of FRANCE.¹²⁰

There were also many rumours circulating in these weeks which illustrate the state of contemporary tension. One was that a French ship wrecked on the Sussex coast had been found to contain a huge cargo of weapons and green uniforms labelled 'Union', this being apparently taken as an attempt to invade Ireland, although *The Times* moved to scotch the rumour.¹²¹ Newspapers began to prepare their case for the defence against any accusations that it was Great Britain which was responsible for any return to war. *The Times* claimed virtuously that all of

¹²⁰ *The Times* 5656 Wednesday March 9, 1803.

¹²¹ *The Times* 5662 Thursday March 17, 1803.

Europe had noted the extent to which Britain had restrained herself from retribution despite considerable provocation from France. Great Britain had gone to great lengths to co-exist peacefully with the revolutionary state, 'under circumstances the most vexatious and trying.' It was France's insatiable military ruler Bonaparte to whom the blame for any return to war must be attributed. The First Consul was depicted as a figure who would ensure that he was not seen as the technical aggressor in any resumption of hostilities.¹²² The newspaper argued further that British sincerity could not be doubted, because of their adherence to all the other terms of the treaty where distrust of the French had little significance on Britain's ability or desire to carry them out. It listed the reception of a Dutch force at the Cape in South Africa and the surrender of Martinique as examples of this.¹²³ But awareness that attempts to defuse diplomatic tension were taking place did not lead the newspapers to concentrate all their attention on the possibility of war; in April *The Times* published an examination of the commercial state of France under Bonaparte detailing expenditure and the supposed disruption to the economy caused by Consular intervention.¹²⁴

One significant theme emerges from the news and comments in British newspapers in the spring of 1803: a juxtaposition of concern about Bonaparte's unlimited domestic power and his apparent inability to conform to diplomatic courtesies. Although aspects of Bonaparte's behaviour, such as his temper, had been the subject of the odd satirical anecdote in the six years in which he had occupied a space in British public consciousness, never before had the First Consul's personality been regarded as having any significant impact on relations

¹²² *The Times* 5656 Wednesday March 9, 1803.

¹²³ *The Times* 5667 Wednesday March 23, 1803.

¹²⁴ *The Times* 5689 Monday April 18, 1803.

between France and other states. Now it threatened the peace with Great Britain. The most significant example of this was the First Consul's outburst at British ambassador Lord Whitworth at a *levée* in March. This loss of temper, and the reported aftermath to the event, when Bonaparte summoned his foreign minister in the middle of the night before dismissing him again, caused a considerable stir. James Farington described the First Consul's behaviour as 'feverish', recounting his conversation with Lord Gardner about the summoning of Talleyrand.¹²⁵ The *Leeds Mercury* reported in early April that Bonaparte had been so outraged by his audience with Whitworth that he had wandered around the Tuileries like a madman, and had had to be restrained and quietened forcibly by Talleyrand.¹²⁶ Although MacCunn probably overstates the point when he says that madness and lack of control were the major behavioural characteristics associated with Bonaparte at this time,¹²⁷ there can be little doubt that concern did exist about the impact of such an outburst on the peace. *The Times* asserted that the quarrel was behind the preparations for war in mid-March,¹²⁸ and used the issue to open discussion about the probability of impending war. The paper claimed that although the First Consul desired war, his state of finance and military preparation were not yet ready, the implication being that Bonaparte's temper had gotten the better of him and that he had exposed his plans earlier than had been his intention.¹²⁹

There can be little doubt that *The Times* believed Britain and France to be on the verge of war in April. The paper charted the constant despatching of

¹²⁵ *Farington Diary* Tuesday March 15, 1803, pp. 1994 - 95.

¹²⁶ *Leeds Mercury* 1874 April 2, 1803.

¹²⁷ MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, pp. 271 - 273; for some qualification, see p. 282.

¹²⁸ *The Times* 5661 Tuesday March 15, 1803.

¹²⁹ *The Times* 5667 Wednesday March 23, 1803.

messages between the French ambassador in London, General Andreossi, and Lord Whitworth in Paris.¹³⁰ The feeling was that Britain must be prepared for conflict because negotiations were uncertain in their outcome. Readers were informed that military installations were being strengthened on the other side of the Channel, ostensibly for colonial support, and were reminded of the First Consul's policy of using standing armies as a diplomatic tool. French military preparations were depicted as another of Bonaparte's attempts to intimidate a potential opponent through the threat of force.¹³¹ Perceptive readers would have recognised this as the same tactic Bonaparte had employed during the negotiation of peace preliminaries in the summer of 1801. Despite these warning signals, *The Times* persisted in hoping that the 'ambitious, restless and unprincipled Government of France' might be persuaded to back down over the issue of Malta and demonstrate its trustworthiness in some fashion. It pointed out that there was room for the French government to back down without complete embarrassment, as their martial preparations had been advertised as being for colonial purposes rather than war in Europe.¹³² Regardless of whether war was to come or not, British newspapers and their readers were aware that the final decision was that of Bonaparte alone. The events of the past year and particularly of the past few weeks would not have inspired confidence that war was not imminent.¹³³

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¹³⁰ *The Times* 5674 Thursday March 31, 1803; *The Times* 5686 Thursday April 14, 1803; *The Times* 5691 Wednesday April 20, 1803; *The Times* 5695 Tuesday April 26, 1803.

¹³¹ *Leeds Mercury* 1870 March 5, 1803; *The Times* 5656 Wednesday March 9, 1803; *The Times* 5677 Monday April 4, 1803.

¹³² *The Times* 5656 Wednesday March 9, 1803; a similar idea, that Bonaparte had trapped himself into action, was expressed in *The Times* 5667 Wednesday March 23, 1803.

¹³³ *The Times* 5661 Tuesday March 15, 1803.

Britain returned to war with France in May 1803. One wonders, as Conrad Gill queried nearly ninety years ago, whether the final break came quickly and unexpectedly despite all the provocations and the strains which British newspapers had been laying before their readers for months.¹³⁴ Gill claims that the reason for the final break was ministerial frustration at Bonaparte's encroachments and his apparently endless appetite for expansion, with the deadlock over Malta as the catalyst. Should Malta be evacuated and be captured by the French, British trade with the East would be endangered.¹³⁵ 'The British went to war simply because they could not stand being further challenged and humiliated by Bonaparte; France went to war because Bonaparte could not stop doing it,' Schroeder has suggested.¹³⁶ The declaration of war in May concluded over a year of growing frustration with Bonaparte's activities and suspicion about his intentions. All of the issues which were prominent in newspaper commentary during the Peace of Amiens - the hostile behaviour of the official French journal, the subjugation of Switzerland, suspicion of French intentions in the Mediterranean - were all symptomatic of a growing loss of faith that Bonaparte could be trusted to abide by any agreement which he concluded. So although the actual break itself might have been unexpected, the readers of British newspapers would have been amply prepared for their ministers' final loss of trust in the First Consul.

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¹³⁴ Gill, 'The Relations between England and France in 1802', p. 61.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 63, 67 - 8, 73.

¹³⁶ Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, p. 243.

CHAPTER SIX

Bonaparte and the language of tyranny: an exploratory analysis.

One of the most significant themes of the historiography of British views of Napoleon Bonaparte is that he was regarded as a tyrannical and despotic figure.¹ The standard work on the subject, MacCunn's *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, claims that from 1798 - 9 Bonaparte was generally depicted as 'a typical Oriental conqueror, hypocritically embracing Mohammedanism, displaying the most odious tyranny, barbarity and callousness, finally baffled by the honest bravery of a few British soldiers under Sir Sidney Smith'.² The previous chapters of this thesis have shown that British views of Bonaparte were conducted within a revolutionary paradigm before November 1799, and that after *Brumaire* there was a reconfiguration to include themes of military and personal government. In an attempt to reveal more about this shift, this chapter examines the deployment of the terms tyranny and despotism between *Brumaire* and the weeks preceding the declaration of war between France and Great Britain in May 1803. It argues that the historical theme of repression associated with revolutionary and military government, a feature of the Whig political tradition, rather than the works of contemporary political theorists, was the major stimulus for the deployment of the language of tyranny. This is demonstrated particularly by the frequency with which Oliver Cromwell was cited in attempts to understand Bonaparte's office and behaviour as First Consul.

¹ There is little appreciable difference in the use of these terms in contemporary sources, and the same policy has been adopted for this study. I would like here to thank Dr. D. X. Powell for a valuable conversation from which this chapter has benefitted greatly, and to thank Dr. Powell and Suzanne Doig for their comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

² MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, p. 17.

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Historians of British political thought in the eighteenth century have concentrated on analysing what has been described as the 'Whig consensus': the belief that the Glorious Revolution of 1688 saved Britain from Stuart absolutism, that Britain was blessed with a balanced constitution and that Britons possessed liberties of person and expression guaranteed by what was known as the Revolutionary settlement. These analyses have generally been confined to canonical texts written by 'representative' thinkers such as Bolingbroke and Burke, and, in one recent study, the enduring influence of classical antecedents on eighteenth-century thought.³ The same is largely true of the British intellectual response to the French Revolution: the major works, Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*, first published in November 1790, and Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*, published in two parts in 1791 and 1792, have been regarded as sufficient examples in themselves of the impact of the French Revolution on British political thought and language.⁴ Only recently have some historians begun to look at the broader relationship between the text and public discourse as a legitimate way of exploring impact and textual meaning. Mark Philp has used this method in part to explain the significance of the literature of 1792 - 3.⁵ This chapter explores the

³ Peter N. Miller *Defining the common good. Empire, religion and philosophy in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1994) (classical antecedents); on the nature of the Whig tradition, see H. T. Dickinson *Liberty and Property. Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York, 1977); Wilfrid Harrison *Conflict and compromise. History of British Political Thought 1593 - 1900* (New York, 1965); J. G. A. Pocock *Virtue, Commerce and History. Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985).

⁴ Thomas Philip Schofield 'Conservative Political Thought in Britain in Response to the French Revolution', *The Historical Journal* 29, 3, 1986, pp. 601 - 622.

⁵ Mark Philp 'Introduction', pp. 1 - 17, and 'The fragmented ideology of reform' in Mark Philp (ed.) *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 50 - 77; see also his 'Vulgar conservatism, 1792 - 3', *English Historical Review* CX, 435, February 1995, pp. 42 - 69. Other attempts along similar lines include Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative*, and, in a less developed fashion, H. T. Dickinson

deployment of the language of tyranny with reference to Bonaparte in the magazines, newspapers and reviews which were the primary vehicles for public discourse.

Only by casting our net widely, rather than relying upon ostensibly 'representative' texts, can we engage in the delicate task of reconstructing political languages by mapping out even apparently minor degrees of emphasis and variation in usage, and thus detect gradual but significant shifts in the deployment of key terms over time,

Gregory Claeys argues, persuasively to this writer.⁶ The neglect of the study of British attitudes to the Revolution in the years between 1795 and 1799 is the major reason that these shifts remain elusive.⁷ The move into the wider realm of public discourse posited here does not imply any diminution in the significance of the works of Burke and Paine. Philp comments perceptively that these texts were very important in setting the parameters of the debate on the Revolution, and Burke's *Letters on a Regicide Peace* are especially deserving of closer examination in any attempt to chart shifts in British perceptions of the Revolution under the Directories.⁸ But it is the contention of this study that popular conceptions of Bonaparte as a ruler were sourced directly from the

'Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism' in *ibid.* (ed.) *Britain and the French Revolution 1789 - 1815* (London, 1989), pp. 103 - 125.

⁶ Gregory Claeys 'The French Revolution debate and British political thought', *History of Political Thought* 11, 1, Spring 1990, p. 59.

⁷ See Introduction, p. 2. There is no single good study of British attitudes to the Revolution beyond 1794, although Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, pp. 142 - 169 and Ben-Israel, *English Historians on the French Revolution*, pp. 3 - 45, contain useful information. This point is recognised by Philp in 'The fragmented ideology of reform', p. 57, n. 20.

⁸ Philp, 'The fragmented ideology of reform', p. 53, 58. I would like to thank Dr. J. E. Cookson for encouraging a sceptical student in the direction of Burke generally, and for indicating to me certain passages in the *Letters on a Regicide Peace*. A study which assesses the impact of the works of Paine and Burke on the newspaper discourses of the 1790s would be invaluable.

themes of the Whig political tradition than from the theories developed in response to the Revolution.

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The main themes which dominate the history of British political thought in the late eighteenth century have been summarised usefully by Philp. He identifies two major schools of historical thought on the subject. The first claims that the eighteenth-century themes of civic humanism and country party opposition remained the most significant feature of British thought during and after the 1790s. The second school identified by Philp believes that the Revolution initiated a fundamental paradigm shift, a marked break from the themes and patterns of the eighteenth century.⁹ It is the latter which is more persuasive to Philp.

What is clear is that the period 1789 - 1803 is one in which the language of political debate undergoes a process of continual transformation. In this process, positions are polarised, terms become invested with value and meaning only to be subsequently abandoned, and the stakes of controversy become extraordinarily inflated.

Although pre-Revolutionary terms were reconstructed and continued to be deployed, the contexts in which they were used and their meanings were not necessarily the same as those of the eighteenth century.¹⁰ Philp cautions that the nature of language should not be confused with the ways it is used or possible meanings, so that even if the terms of the Whig consensus were the vehicle for the expression of opinion about the Revolution, 'there should be little doubt that new paradigms of political thought and participation were being tabled.'¹¹ This is

⁹ Philp, 'The fragmented ideology of reform', p. 54.

¹⁰ Philp, 'Introduction', p. 13 (including quotation).

an attractive suggestion, recognising, as it does, that discourses continued to be conducted in traditional language while avoiding the unconvincing idea that the deployment and meaning of such language remained static.

The issue of whether terms can be regarded as having possessed universal meanings for contemporaries has been raised recently by Jonathan Clark in his synoptic work *The language of liberty*. Clark suggests that rather than having inherently universal meanings, terms such as tyranny and despotism might have been attributed meaning according to their contexts. He argues also that rather than being derived from works of high political theory, political language was based on 'standard themes of the folk memories of Protestant denominations.' This suggests that historical awareness of the political and constitutional upheavals of the seventeenth century was more important in conditioning the use of political language than the canonical texts used by historians.¹²

Plausible though Clark's arguments may be, they offer obvious difficulties to the student of political terminology. The idea of polysemism undermines severely the ability of the historian to attribute identifiable definitions to terms; it implies that they can be understood only with reference to detailed contextual knowledge not usually available when analysing information taken from sources such as newspapers. A modified version of Clark's argument may resolve this problem. Accepting that the existence of some common meaning is the logical conclusion to over a century of deployment of terms in the public domain, this chapter seeks to construct a model which can be used to explore profitably the application of political terminology to Bonaparte. As well as a universal meaning conditioned by assumptions about arbitrary Stuart

¹¹ Philp, 'The fragmented ideology of reform', p. 54.

¹² J. C. D. Clark *The language of liberty, 1660 - 1832: political discourse and social dynamics in the Anglo-American world* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 24 - 25.

government and eighteenth-century Whig beliefs about the constitution, meaning would also have been determined by the social and political contexts of both the writer and the reader. The use of terms by the writer would have been determined by interaction between the universal and the local, and the meaning derived by the reader would have been a reconstruction involving the same process.

The first issue which needs to be explored is whether the terminology of political repression was first applied after the coup of *Brumaire* which elevated Bonaparte to personal revolutionary rule in November 1799. This was not the case. British newspapers did not hesitate to apply such language to the oligarchical Directory which governed France while Bonaparte was campaigning in Italy and encamped in Egypt. The Directors were described as tyrants and were compared with Oliver Cromwell in *Lloyd's Evening Post* in March 1798, for example.¹³ Although the application of political language to French governments before 1799 is not within the province of this study, it seems from the comments surrounding the comparison that what was being criticised was repressive behaviour. What this example does demonstrate is that tyranny and despotism were not terms linked solely with rule by a single figure.¹⁴

¹³ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, and *British Chronicle* 6325 Monday 12 March - Wednesday 14 March 1798, p. 243. For other examples of this, see *Morning Post* 9373 Monday January 21, 1799; *Morning Post* 9466 Thursday May 9, 1799.

¹⁴ This is an issue which deserves closer examination. There is a passage in Burke's *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, for example, which argues that although the British government is based on the personal liberty of the individual, and is therefore inefficient, that this is preferable to the repression of the rights of the individual inherent in the present Revolutionary government, which is described as 'military in its principle, in its maxims, in its spirit, and in all its movements. The state has dominion and conquest for its sole objects; dominion over minds by proselytism, over bodies by arms'. The following paragraph refers to France since the Revolution as a 'despotism'. Awareness of the use of force by a civilian revolutionary government should not be conflated with later recognition of a regime with a military figure at its head. *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, Letter II. *On the genius and character of the French Revolution as it regards other nations*, 1796, in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* volume V (London, 1855), pp. 254 - 255.

Recognition that *Brumaire* introduced military power into the Revolution made Bonaparte potentially more dangerous to the liberties of his subjects than his predecessors. France was regarded as having exchanged a chaotic, overly democratic government for military rule. The very title of Bonaparte's office, 'Consul', had strong martial overtones, and *The Times* predicted that the prospective military dictatorship of Bonaparte was to be feared much more than the civilian one of Robespierre.¹⁵ Many of the newspapers which had entertained a moderate sympathy for the original aims of the Revolution were extremely discouraged by its degeneration into military rule. The *Morning Chronicle* claimed that the coup 'delivers over the French people to a pure and undisguised military despotism'.¹⁶ It is clear that the application of the language of tyranny to Bonaparte which began after *Brumaire* was linked intimately with the belief that he was a military ruler.

Although the new regime seemed likely to be repressive, some commentators were prepared to suspend judgement until they found evidence. Awareness of the military basis of the new government was not sufficient in itself to provoke universal condemnation. One writer in the *Critical Review* hoped that friction between the French people and their governors might soon die down, 'as Buonaparte seems inclined to relinquish that arbitrary and imperious spirit of encroachment which the late directory so frequently exhibited'.¹⁷ The offer of peace negotiations at Christmas 1799, only weeks after Bonaparte had taken power, encouraged some to believe that he was better-intentioned than previous revolutionary governments.¹⁸ Over the next two years, however, many

¹⁵ *The Times* 4644 Wednesday November 20, 1799.

¹⁶ *Morning Chronicle* 9513 Monday November 18, 1799 (quotation); see also *The Observer* 416 December 8, 1799; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 192 December 29, 1799, p. 412; *The Annual Register* for 1800, p. 38.

¹⁷ 'Review of Public Affairs' in *Critical Review* 28, 1800, p. 592.

commentators entertained subdued suspicions about the intentions of the First Consul. Reporting on the creation of new organs of government in February 1800, the *Morning Post* stated that all positions were nominated by the First Consul, 'who thus, every day, is accumulating power in his own hands.'¹⁹ The language of repression was used in this instance because Bonaparte was believed to be acquiring power with only sketchy limitations, and because he was recognised as exercising it in repressive ways. One good example of this was the reception of the news in January 1801 that opponents of the Consulate were to be exiled to a French penal colony in Guiana, their exile being, according to *The Times*, 'because they do not like Corsicans or Consuls'. On another occasion, the banishment of individuals who had returned to Europe from the insurrectionary French territories in the Caribbean was described by the same newspaper as 'A fresh instance of the despotism exercised by the French Government.'²⁰ Bonaparte was regarded as repressing the existing right of citizens to freedom of expression, and the pointed mention of the military title of his office was an explicit reference to the belief that such a despotic action was the result of the military nature of the government.

The language of political repression was deployed because of underlying assumptions about the behaviour of military governments, and in response to what was regarded as repressive behaviour. Although overt references to military government in general commentary declined in the years after Bonaparte's assumption of political power, this should probably not be taken as a diminution in the significance of the theme. Rather, awareness that the Consulate

¹⁸ See Chapter Three, 'Bonaparte as revolutionary ruler: from the coup of *Brumaire* to the summer of 1800', pp. 69 - 70.

¹⁹ *Morning Post* 9815 Tuesday February 25, 1800.

²⁰ *The Times* 5007 Monday January 19, 1801 ('Corsicans and Consuls'), and *The Times* 5199 Monday August 31, 1801 ('A fresh instance...').

was a military regime, and therefore repressive, became an implicit assumption which could be invoked by the use of the language of tyranny or frequent references to 'the Consul' or 'Consular government'. Newspapers were more interested in events than in devoting attention to the nature of the government in France.

From 1802 attention was focused on the removal of formal safeguards against Bonaparte's unlimited exercise of his powers.²¹ Previously the elective nature of the Consular office had been regarded by some commentators as a restraint on this possibility.²² The fact that two years of Consular government had brought about attempts at domestic reconstruction, the pacification of Europe and especially the conclusion of war with Great Britain was enough for some commentators to believe that Bonaparte might still draw back from becoming an unlimited tyrant. This belief was to be undermined severely by news of the campaign for the life consulship in the summer of 1802. The response to Bonaparte's achievement of virtual monarchical status complete with hereditary succession seems to have been an increase in the frequency of the use of the language of tyranny. The invasion of Switzerland by French troops, the erratic accusations of the official French journal and the expedition sent to survey the eastern Mediterranean were all described as the behaviour of a military ruler who was no longer subject to either formal or informal restrictions.²³

The increase in the frequency of the language of tyranny which accompanied the establishment of the life consulship does not seem to have diminished the use of revolutionary as well as military reference points. One anecdote which

²¹ See Chapter Five, 'The Peace of Amiens: from the autumn of 1801 to April 1803', pp. 121 - 126.

²² *Considerations concerning peace*, pp. 14 - 15.

²³ See Chapter Five, pp. 127 - 134.

illustrates this well is *The Times*' criticism of complaints from *Le Moniteur*, the official French journal which was widely regarded as the mouthpiece of the Consul, that hospitality was being accorded to members of the deposed French royal family in Great Britain. The tale was described as proving, 'beyond all doubt, the despotic principles of the French Government, and the littleness which is no uncommon accompaniment of despotism.'²⁴ Several layers of meaning can be discerned in this tale; what is especially significant is the relationship between the display of behaviour labelled 'despotic' and the revolutionism implied to have generated it. The deployment of the term is underscored by the implication that Bonaparte's petulant behaviour has occurred because he is aware of his illegitimacy as a military and revolutionary ruler. The story implies that the First Consul is jealous that a neighbouring state would accept the family of an exiled ruler when he was trying hard to legitimate himself. The same accusations and use of terms, 'the despotic system which prevails in France', occurred on several later occasions.²⁵ The usage here links underlying awareness of the revolutionary and military nature of the Consulate with evidence that once he had removed himself from restrictions, the First Consul's behaviour would be repressive. Note that the first statement begins with the assertion that the anecdote proves 'beyond all doubt' that Bonaparte's government is despotic. The protest against the treatment given to the Bourbons in Britain is being used here as evidence to convince those still uncertain about the nature of the Consulate even after Bonaparte had assumed office for life, and invokes a reference to generic characteristics of despotism, 'the littleness which is no uncommon accompaniment', in support of this.

²⁴ *The Times* 5438 Wednesday June 9, 1802.

²⁵ *The Times* 5493 Thursday August 19, 1802; *The Times* 5519 Monday September 20, 1802 (quotation).

Generalisations in this chapter about the persistence of underlying themes of revolutionism and the link between repressive behaviour and the language of tyranny must be qualified because of their reliance on *The Times*. As Chapter Five has revealed, this newspaper persisted in criticising Bonaparte as both a revolutionary and a military tyrant. Such a juxtaposition may very well have been the norm. Visitors to France during the Peace of Amiens did describe the Consulate as a revolutionary military despotism.²⁶ But the inherent hostility of *The Times* to every aspect of the Revolution probably renders its pronouncements relatively unrepresentative. One suspects that the opposition newspapers, those which maintained some lingering sympathy for the moderate aims of the Revolution, would have regarded the creation of a military monarchy somewhat differently.

The previous paragraphs have argued that the language of political repression, the terms tyranny and despotism, was not necessarily employed with reference to French revolutionary governments dominated by individuals, but that evidence of repression was probably a significant stimulus. The introduction of military power into the Revolution and signs that Bonaparte's regime was a repressive one seem to have been the major reasons that his government was labelled despotic. Revolutionism seems also to have been a significant factor generating the deployment of political terms in this period. But perhaps in looking for indications of contemporary beliefs about Bonaparte as a ruler we need to examine other rhetorical devices. Historical figures, notably James II, have been suggested to have been a significant feature of the Whig conception of the development of the British constitution.²⁷ It is likely, therefore, that an exploration of those figures with whom Bonaparte was compared will reveal

²⁶ See Chapter Five, pp. 112 - 115; *The Diary of Bertie Greatheed*, Wednesday 26 January 1803, p. 37; *Farington Diary* Wednesday September 22, 1802, p. 1870.

²⁷ See the works cited in n. 3 above, particularly Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*.

further information about the ways the First Consul was conceived as a political figure.

One possible contemporary model for political repression was prime minister William Pitt. Cookson has claimed that the liberal 'Friends of Peace' believed Pitt to be attempting to entrench his power beyond all opposition through the creation of a 'war system', a belief shaped also by resentment at Pitt's exchange of the reforming causes he had supported in the 1780s for the repressive policies of the 1790s.²⁸ Bonaparte and Pitt were compared on several occasions, most notably by *Bell's Weekly Messenger* in its commentary on the peace preliminaries in the autumn of 1801. But these comparisons contain little more than praise for the First Consul's conclusion of peace with Great Britain and condemnation of Pitt as a warmonger.²⁹ The fact that Pitt was out of office between February 1801 and the end of the period examined in this study may account for the lack of detailed comparisons between the two figures.

Another model for despotism was Czar Paul of Russia. MacCunn has noted the unpopularity of the Czar in Britain in the years 1800 - 1, when Russia was allied with France. He claims that Paul 'temporarily usurped the proper place of Bonaparte as the Enemy of Mankind in English opinion; and subsequently the two were frequently bracketed as types of despots liable to insane passion.'³⁰ Although the newspapers used in this study were hostile to the Czar, and were aware and resentful of his diplomatic relationship with France,³¹ the

²⁸ Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, pp. 144 - 149.

²⁹ See Chapter Four, 'Bonaparte and peacemaking: from the summer of 1800 to the autumn of 1801', pp. 82 - 83 and 97.

³⁰ MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, p. 30.

³¹ See Chapter Four, p. 85; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 243 December 21, 1800, p. 405; *The Times* 5004 Thursday January 15, 1801; *The Times* 5049 Tuesday March 10, 1801; *The Times* 5086 Thursday April 23, 1801.

relationship between this and the use of political terminology is less easy to determine. The fact that the same language was used in commentary about both rulers implies that common features were being recognised. Repressive behaviour may be the solution to this question. Paul seems to have been regarded as an unbalanced figure, prone to erratic and oppressive behaviour, and he was of course unpopular because he had allied against Britain in the Revolutionary war. But the opportunities for comparison were probably cut short by Paul's assassination in the spring of 1801, an event which led to a softening of attitude towards him.³²

The study of relations between Britain and her foreign possessions is providing a great deal of valuable information about the nature of domestic political beliefs in the late eighteenth century. The work of C. A. Bayly and P. J. Marshall in particular reveals much about the themes and concerns which emerged from the loss of the American colonies and the extension of British power and influence in the Indian subcontinent.³³ It is the contemporary reputation of Tipu Sahib, Sultan of Mysore, which is of greatest interest to this study. Bayly makes an explicit comparison between British views of Tipu and of Bonaparte, claiming (without reference to the historical literature about the latter) that they were regarded as complimentary figures:

³² Mackesy, *War without victory*, pp. 203 - 205; for the softening of attitude, see Chapter Five, n. 24.

³³ C. A. Bayly *Imperial Meridian. The British Empire and the World 1780 - 1830* (Harlow, 1989) and P. J. Marshall 'Cornwallis Triumphant: War in India and the British Public in the Late Eighteenth Century' in Laurence Freedman, Paul Hayes and Robert O'Neill (eds.) *War, strategy and international politics. Essays in honour of Sir Michael Howard* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 57 - 74. Bayly's study uses the language of tyranny as a tool for gathering evidence about the changing relations between the participants in imperial relations, but treats the terms as unproblematic in themselves. This citational approach fails to examine the meanings with which terms were vested and the contexts in which they were deployed. See Bayly, pp. 131, 152 - 153, 156. I would like to thank Dr. I. J. Catanach for a stimulating conversation on Tipu Sahib and for fleshing out my regrettably meagre knowledge of Indian and imperial history.

the generation of the 1790s began to grasp a parallel between the wickedness of its European enemies and the fury of its Asiatic foes. Bonaparte, the embodiment of 'French tyranny', had already achieved the status of universal ogre before 1800. It is interesting how the European enemy was mirrored in the person of an oriental enemy. Tipu Sultan of Mysore now became the embodiment of 'Muhammedan tyranny' and he was similarly accused of violation of the conventions of war and the 'intercourse of nations'.³⁴

The basis for Bayly's comparison is that Bonaparte was regarded as a 'universal ogre' before 1800, and that characteristics from this belief were applied to the Indian ruler. This study does not support such an idea. Bayly himself notes that Tipu and his father had been enemies of the British since the 1780s,³⁵ for over a decade before Bonaparte had first entered British consciousness as a revolutionary general. It seems much more likely that the themes of erratic behaviour used to describe Tipu as a tyrant were transferred for application in the European sphere.

The significance of Tipu is explored in greater detail in Marshall's article on the domestic reception of news about war in India in the late eighteenth century. He claims that British attitudes towards the Indian ruler were symptomatic of changing attitudes towards imperial rule. To the public at home, the British invasion of Mysore was presented 'not as conquerors but as liberators of the mass of the population from the 'tyranny' of Tipu. The annexation of new territories would be an act of benevolence, not of ambition.'³⁶ Marshall adds to Bayly's claim that stories of Tipu's brutal mistreatment of prisoners remained examples of tyrannical behaviour until well into the

³⁴ Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, p. 113.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ Marshall, ' 'Cornwallis Triumphant' ', p. 72.

nineteenth century that the Indian ruler was regarded as an implacable foe who hated Christians, but the British in particular.³⁷ Some of these themes can be detected in coverage of Bonaparte; several papers did claim that Bonaparte resented the British particularly because he blamed them for his defeats in Egypt.³⁸ Stock themes such as the massacre of prisoners have been argued not to have been a major feature of the discourse on Bonaparte between 1796 and 1803, but they have been located by historians as a significant feature of the literature of 1803 - 4. It seems likely that these themes were absorbed into a pool of characteristics used to define despotic behaviour. Bonaparte and Tipu had two significant elements in common: they were regarded as barriers to the extension or maintenance of British interests, and they were at various times protagonists at war.³⁹ Depicting them as entertaining an especial hatred for the British not only strengthened their identification as the enemy, but it also had the comforting effect of self-justification.

The most substantive examples of models for Bonaparte were figures from history. Historical comparisons were a valuable method of conceptualising events and figures in a society which looked to the past rather than to the future for understanding. Chapter Two has noted that Bonaparte's achievements in Italy in 1796 - 7 and Egypt in 1798 - 9 led him to be compared with the great generals of history.⁴⁰ After the coup which established Bonaparte as ruler of

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 70 - 71 and Bayly, p. 114.

³⁸ *The Times* 4865 Monday August 4, 1800; *The Observer* 451 August 10, 1800; *Morning Post* 10 023 Thursday October 23, 1800 and *The Times* 5021 Wednesday February 4, 1801.

³⁹ It is tempting to speculate that the reason that themes of massacres do not feature before the return to war in the spring of 1803, but may do so in the literature of the following months, is because all the conditions necessary for their deployment were not fulfilled until this time: Bonaparte was now protagonist at war and an identifiable personal threat to British interests (their own domestic security).

⁴⁰ See Chapter Two, 'Bonaparte as roving revolutionary: the Egyptian expedition, 1798 - 9', p. 52.

France, those often invoked were the great generals of antiquity. Foremost among these was Julius Caesar, the outstanding example of a general who had assumed political power upon returning from campaigning in foreign parts.⁴¹ Peter Miller has alerted historians to the enduring significance of classical models in eighteenth-century thought; the use of such reference points for Bonaparte supports his general thesis.⁴² But the most significant model for explaining the origins of Bonaparte's rule, his behaviour and his possible fate was much closer to home: Oliver Cromwell, seventeenth-century English Lord Protector, military conqueror and revolutionary ruler. The remainder of this chapter will examine the eighteenth-century reputation of Cromwell, explore his place in contemporary conceptions of military tyranny and argue that awareness of similarities between Bonaparte and Cromwell was a very significant factor in the deployment of the language of tyranny to Bonaparte.

Research into the eighteenth-century reputation of Oliver Cromwell has been published recently by Roger Howell, Jr. He claims that the Protector's legacy was considerably more complex than has been generally recognised. The primary themes associated with Cromwell were those of military government, revolutionary illegitimacy and repression. While John Hampden and Algernon Sidney were depicted as examples of reasonable opposition to an unreasonable executive, Cromwell stood for violent overthrow and illegitimate personal rule - the personification of tyranny.⁴³ Howell argues that there was a secondary

⁴¹ For comparisons with great generals, see *ibid.*; for those with classical generals who were also political figures, see review of *Campaign of General Bonaparte in Italy in 1796 - 7*, translated from the French by T.E. Ritchie in *Monthly Review* 31 January - April 1800, p. 219; *The Times* 4730 Thursday February 27, 1800; *The Times* 4986 Thursday December 25, 1800.

⁴² Miller, *Defining the common good*, especially the chapters 'The figure of Cicero' and 'A classical landscape', pp. 21 - 149.

⁴³ Roger Howell, Jr. 'Cromwell, the English Revolution and political symbolism in eighteenth-century England' in R. C. Richardson (ed.) *Images of Oliver Cromwell. Essays for and by Roger Howell, Jr.* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 64 - 68, 71.

strand of thought which associated Cromwell with national prosperity because of his achievements in trade and strengthening of English national power. He judges support for this secondary strand of belief difficult to assess, because of the strength of the ideological mainstream. It seems that although there was a deeper understanding of the circumstances of the man and his times by the late eighteenth century, 'the hostile image of him remained the dominant feature of the historiography of the period, regardless of the political stance of the author concerned.' Howell suggests that Cromwell's value as a weapon to suppress ideas regarded as dangerous to the ideological mainstream was the reason for the persistence of his image as a repressive figure.⁴⁴ Cromwell seems also to have been regarded as a tragic individual. An article entitled 'Cromwell, or the Picture of a Man conscious of having violated the natural and civil Rights of his Countrymen' was published in the liberal journal the *Oeconomist* in April 1799. This article provides further valuable indications of the reputation of Cromwell in the late eighteenth century, although the subject for implicit comparison was probably Pitt. Cromwell is depicted as a man who suffered greatly because of his illegitimate rule. The article claims that the greatness to which he aspired was beyond his grasp, and this was the cause of his enormous mental anguish. It is alleged that Cromwell ended up 'seeing nothing around him but treacherous friends or enraged enemies, possessing the confidence of no party, resting his title on no principle, civil or religious'. He became a pathetic recluse, a man forced to resort to absurd lengths for personal security. The implications of these comments are fairly obvious: he who possessed power through illegitimate means should not expect to sleep easily at night.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 64 (quotation), pp. 69 - 71.

⁴⁵ 'Cromwell, or the Picture of a Man conscious of having violated the natural and civil Rights of his Countrymen', *Oeconomist* XVI April 1799, pp. 122 - 123 (quotation p. 122). Similar sentiments were expressed in the article 'Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century' by T. Mot in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for February 1800, p. 119. For the idea that Pitt was the intended subject of comparison, see Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, pp. 130 - 1 and 144 - 149.

Even had they not shared so many obviously similar characteristics, comparisons between Cromwell and Bonaparte are likely to have been made. As Howell comments, 'it is clear that, long before Carlyle, people had discovered the applicability of Cromwell to contemporary social and political problems.'⁴⁶ Bonaparte was not the first revolutionary ruler in France to be compared with the English Protector. His predecessors, the Directors, were judged to be tyrannical on grounds of similarities to the Lord Protector on several occasions in 1798 and 1799.⁴⁷ The justification for the deployment of the Cromwell analogy on these occasions is not immediately apparent; the Directories were not regarded as being military governments, although their use of military power to sustain their political position may have been motivating factors. Probably this is another example of the redefinition of concepts and language suggested by Philp; it is a logical assumption that, like the language to which it contributed meaning, the Cromwell metaphor was reconstructed for use in the ideological conflicts of the 1790s.⁴⁸

Allusions between Bonaparte and Cromwell began in the immediate aftermath of the coup of *Brumaire*, and were concerned initially with analysing the nature of the new regime and Bonaparte's operation of his office. Although conceding that there were differing circumstances surrounding the elevation to power of the two men, the *Morning Chronicle* argued that both used the fanaticism of the time to ingratiate themselves with others before their ambitions were realised.⁴⁹ The similarities in the careers and military origins of both men were often referred to after *Brumaire*; differences were less often recognised. A minority of commentators did explore in detail the respective

⁴⁶ Howell, 'Cromwell, the English Revolution and political symbolism', pp. 72 - 73.

⁴⁷ See n. 13 above.

⁴⁸ Philp, 'Introduction', p. 13; 'The fragmented ideology of reform', p. 54.

⁴⁹ *Morning Chronicle* 9513 Monday November 18, 1799.

situations of the two individuals just prior to their assumption of power. The Reverend Charles Edward Stewart, author of the pamphlet *Thoughts on the Letter of Buonaparte, on the pacifick principles*, argued that while Cromwell had either to take the reins of government or become a private citizen, a near impossible situation, Bonaparte's situation was quite different; the new First Consul betrayed and abandoned all his friends by seizing power for himself upon his return from Egypt. Circumstances were cited as the distinguishing characteristic which separated the two men: Cromwell's position had been thrust upon him, but Bonaparte's participation in *Brumaire* was regarded as a calculated act.⁵⁰ Detailed analysis of this kind was not typical of the newspapers, however. This probably owes as much to the nature of the publication as to inclination; the expository pamphlet offered greater room for such detail than the newspapers did. Commentators may also have been reluctant to qualify what must have appeared a near-perfect comparison.

The Lord Protector was not the only figure from the English Revolution with whom Bonaparte was compared. In the six months which followed *Brumaire* some commentators were willing to argue that the new First Consul might turn out to be a General Monk, a military figure thrust into a powerful position who had elected in favour of the restoration of Charles II in 1660. The influential presence of the apostate bishop and arch-schemer Siéyès encouraged some to believe that Bonaparte would be a Monk, rather than a Cromwell. *The Times* suggested that Bonaparte, Siéyès and Barras (whom it believed was still a powerful if now shadowy figure) would 'not act the part of MONK, till that of CROMWELL can no longer be sustained.' Bonaparte and his associates would prolong their occupation of office for as long as possible, securing for

⁵⁰ Stewart, *Thoughts on the Letter of Buonaparte*, pp. 27 - 28. Contemporary revisionism of Bonaparte's role in *Brumaire* occurred over the following months and is probably at work here: the idea that Bonaparte generated his own rise to power was a feature of the spring of 1800, not the autumn of 1799 (see Chapter Three, pp. 64 - 5, for a more detailed discussion of this).

themselves a position of strength from which to negotiate for the return of the exiled Louis XVIII.⁵¹ References to Monk diminished as the months passed, Bonaparte won a significant victory at Marengo in the summer of 1800, and the prospect of a Bourbon restoration looked increasingly unlikely.⁵² The response to this was that the Cromwell metaphor assumed predominance in the discourse, illustrating further that the intellectual response to changing international circumstances included shifts in language.

In the years between 1800 and 1803 the Cromwell analogy was often deployed as a generalised reference point for understanding Bonaparte's motivations and behaviour, events within France and French relations with other states. It was a useful way of referring to a defined range of characteristics it was implied Bonaparte and Cromwell had in common, circumventing the need for lengthy explanations. One allusion in *Bell's Weekly Messenger* in November 1800, for example, seems simply to have been shorthand for figures who upset the status quo.⁵³ Comparisons were also tailored to specific events; when noting that the First Consul was experiencing problems with the political loyalties of his brother Lucien, *The Times* stated that Cromwell also suffered from the disloyalty of family members.⁵⁴ The themes of insecurity and neurotic behaviour were also applied to Bonaparte, particularly when referring to recurrent assassination attempts. The nervous state in which the First Consul was believed to exist was described pithily on one occasion as 'the dreadful barter of innocence

⁵¹ *The Times* 4650 November 26, 1799 (quotation); also *The Times* 4644 Wednesday November 20, 1799.

⁵² The reviewer of the pamphlet *Les Adieux à Bonaparte*, which implored the First Consul to step down in favour of his legitimate sovereign, claimed that his self-affirmation at Marengo had rendered any restoration unlikely: *Monthly Review* 32 May - August 1800, pp. 439 - 440.

⁵³ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 239 November 23, 1800, p. 374.

⁵⁴ *The Times* 4842 Wednesday July 9, 1800.

for power, and the exchange of ambition with repose', a phrase which could have been applied equally well to Cromwell.⁵⁵

After the summer of 1802, awareness that the Consulate was a military government was accompanied by the knowledge that Bonaparte had also usurped monarchical and hereditary principles through his assumption of office for life.⁵⁶ This issue offered significant new potential for comparison, because Cromwell had refused the offer of hereditary kingship. *The Times* observed that while it had never given credence to the many rumours of plots and attempts against Bonaparte's person, the example of Cromwell might be a useful one to explain present events. It claimed that the English Protector had been apprehensive about the army officers who had elevated him to high office, but who had threatened his life if he had assumed the kingship. Might not one of the reported attempts on the First Consul's life succeed in line with this historical precedent, the newspaper queried.⁵⁷ Once again the past was being used to understand the present and as an indication of what might happen in the future. But Cromwell was also used because it was an unthreatening analogy, one, in fact, which implicitly confirmed the righteousness of the existing social and political system in Great Britain. Commentators and readers would have been well aware that the Protectorate lasted only a year after Cromwell's death, and that although there was a further period of turbulence, from the Glorious Revolution of 1688 had emerged the seeds of the political stability, guarantee of personal liberties and commercial prosperity of which Britons were vociferously proud. The use of the Cromwell analogy was, then, a 'safe' one; the English Revolution had led ultimately to the settled society in which the writer and readers existed.

⁵⁵ *The Times* 5538 Tuesday October 12, 1802.

⁵⁶ See Chapter Five, pp. 121 - 126.

⁵⁷ *The Times* 5431 Tuesday June 1, 1802.

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This chapter has followed Gregory Claeys' suggestion to examine shifts in the nature of political language beyond the closed systems of canonical texts. It has explored the nature of the terms and allusions deployed with reference to Bonaparte between 1800 and 1803. The chapter has suggested that the theme of the repression of personal liberties was the major stimulus behind the deployment of the language of tyranny. The belief that certain governments were repressive in nature may explain why the same terms were applied to the First Consul's predecessors, but a combination of awareness that the coup of *Brumaire* represented the introduction of military power into the Revolution, and a belief that the Consulate was repressive seem to have been the reasons behind the application of the language of tyranny to Bonaparte. The chapter has also explored a variety of potential models for repressive behaviour, and has illustrated the prevalence of Oliver Cromwell as the figure with whom Bonaparte was most often compared. Cromwell represented the dangers of revolutionary and military government to personal liberties, and the obvious parallels with Bonaparte as First Consul were not lost on contemporaries. The fact that there was a resurgence in comparisons at the time of Bonaparte's assumption of office for life in the summer of 1802 illustrates this clearly. Finally, some assessment of the significance of these generalisations to Mark Philp's suggestion that new paradigms of thought were being tabled despite the persistence of existing forms of language is necessary. This is a complex question which requires much more detailed investigation than has been possible in this study. The fact that British commentators were mining the eighteenth-century political tradition in an attempt to understand the events of the present appears to mitigate against Philp's suggestion. But the specific choice of an historical figure who was both a revolutionary and a military figure suggests that commentators were selecting the most appropriate figure from their own history in their attempt to understand the nature of the latest government in France.

CONCLUSION

The major aim of this thesis has been to examine British views of Bonaparte between 1796 and 1803 without reproducing faults identified in the existing historical literature. Foremost among these faults is the use of juxtaposed evidence in the construction of broad generalisations that Bonaparte's reputation was as an inhuman figure, a man who poisoned his troops and who was conspiring to overthrow the existing French government. Historians have taken as their evidence for this comments from different points within the twenty years between 1796 and 1815, a practice encouraged in large part by the abundance of material generated during the invasion crisis of 1803 - 4 and the conclusion of the Napoleonic war in 1814 - 15. The themes present in these sources have been imposed both forwards and backwards when making claims about British beliefs; MacCunn, for example, cites evidence from 1803 and 1798 when generalising about British views of the Egyptian expedition of 1798 - 9.¹

This study proposed to test the existing generalisations applying a chronological method. The thesis was divided into five event-based chapters, with material from outside these periods not being included in their analyses. The results have been to allow the study to assess both the relative significance of themes in response to events, and to assess changes in these themes in response to the changing circumstances of Bonaparte between 1796 and 1803. But inherent in the use of a chronological approach is the danger of disjointed particularism. Accordingly, the following paragraphs will outline briefly the ways this thesis has assessed the themes emphasised in the historical literature

¹ MacCunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon*, p. 17.

and argued for their replacement with a revolutionist paradigm for the broader period 1796 to 1799. The contribution this study has made to the difficult question of the shifting perceptions of Bonaparte after *Brumaire* will be explored, and finally questions which have been revealed as deserving of further investigation will be outlined briefly.

* * * * *

The most significant theme emphasised in the literature is that of inhumanity: of Bonaparte being regarded by the British as a cruel figure conspiring to poison and abandon his troops in the Egyptian desert and scheming to seize political power. This thesis has demonstrated conclusively that this is an inaccurate, not to mention simplistic, representation of the subject. Revolutionism, rather than revulsion, characterised British views of Bonaparte in the three and a half years from the summer of 1796 until November 1799. During the Italian campaign and occupation of 1796 - 8 Bonaparte was conceived as a revolutionary general, engaged in the transmission of French republican ideologies to the Italians. Some newspapers sneered at what they regarded as the excesses of revolutionist enthusiasm; but rather ironically, it was Bonaparte's humanity which was emphasised in the newspapers and magazines which maintained a subdued admiration for the aims of the Revolution. Bonaparte was cast in these as a noble figure, restraining his soldiers from acts of barbarity encouraged by their liberation from the norms of civilised behaviour.

And the revolutionist conception was little altered in that period from which the historical literature has mined so extensively, the Egyptian expedition of 1798 - 9. Chapter Two has demonstrated that a personal commitment to the mission of ideological colonisation, rather than cruelty, was the primary conception of Bonaparte in these years. This is not to deny that British

newspapers were aware of the deaths which occurred among the troops under Bonaparte's command, or that Bonaparte might not have been blamed for these deaths. The reporting in the newspapers indicates a tone of implicit criticism that Frenchmen had died in an inhospitable environment far from their homes, for what seemed a progressively more futile reason.

But while historians have conflated reports of deaths at this time with accusations of tyranny from later years and of cruelties from the literature of 1803, this study has found no evidence to suggest that at the time of the expedition Bonaparte was regarded as having callously poisoned his wounded troops, or that he was seen as plotting to launch an assault on the domestic government. The point at which stories of poisonings do seem to have entered the discourse is during the last two years examined in this study, when accounts of the British expeditionary force to Egypt were published. And there is room for doubt about the impact of such stories even at this time. They were not, for instance, a significant feature of *The Times*, the newspaper most consistently hostile to Bonaparte and which would surely have referred to such emotive information in its criticism of the First Consul.

Nor was Bonaparte believed to have been scheming for political power in the three years before 1799. His politics were those of revolutionary expansion; his ambitions were seen in career terms. The association between the Egyptian expedition and personal tyranny did not exist at the time of the expedition itself, and does not seem to have featured before 1803 either. When newspapers did comment on the expedition, and it seems very likely that it had a low profile after the news in the autumn of 1798 of Nelson's victory at the Nile, they concentrated on its ideological intentions. The expedition was characterised consistently as a republican venture, an attempt to take revolutionary ideologies

to foreign lands, and Bonaparte's command was seen as evidence of his personal belief in the cause.

A significant subsidiary theme of this general picture has been that the British regarded Bonaparte as a religious hypocrite, who cynically adopted the Moslem religion while in Egypt. This thesis has demonstrated that until November 1799 at least, considerations of Bonaparte and religion were linked inextricably with his conception as a revolutionary. During the Italian period religion featured only in occasionally approving comments about his moderation in negotiations with the Pope, favourable treatment of established religion not being regarded as usual among the exponents of French revolutionism. Bonaparte was further associated with the apostatical tendencies of the Revolution in contemporary commentary on the Egyptian expedition. The second chapter has uncoupled the connection which has been made between contemporary awareness of Bonaparte's adoption of the Moslem religion and stories of his inhuman behaviour. Comments about Bonaparte and religion were wry or satirical, rather than damning; and the accommodation to native religious beliefs was regarded as much as a practical tactic employed in the wider attempt to cultivate republicanism among the Egyptians.

After *Brumaire* and Bonaparte's establishment as First Consul, it is interesting to note the not unfavourable reaction to the news that he was attempting to restore the Roman Catholic church in France. There was little mention of any cynicism about his religious beliefs except in *The Times*. Rather Bonaparte was regarded as being more sympathetic to the resurrection of traditional worship than many others would be in his position. It is true that his negotiations with the Pope were regarded by some as being as much for political purposes as for any personal belief; and the official toleration of Protestantism was seen as an attempt to reconcile as many Frenchmen to the Consulate as

possible. And there does seem to have been a definite shift between the belief in 1800 - 1 that Bonaparte was restoring pre-revolutionary institutions to strengthen his particular form of revolutionary government, to one by the time of the formal reconciliation in the spring of 1802 that religion was being restored to support Bonaparte's rule, a subtle but significant distinction. But the revolutionist subtext remained an integral part of this shift: the Concordat between France and the Papacy was conceived as the restoration of a revolutionary nation to the mother church of most of Europe, as much as an attempt by a tyrant to bolster his arbitrary power.

* * * * *

It is clear, then, that revolutionism, rather than revulsion, was the fundamental paradigm for British views of Bonaparte between 1796 and 1799, and that a measure of reinterpretation was applied to events in following years. The intricate relationship between revolutionary, personal and military elements which was constructed after the coup of *Brumaire* was a very complex one. There seems to have been a shift from a revolutionist paradigm to one which accommodated both revolutionism and awareness of the military nature of Bonaparte's regime. This shift has not been easy to quantify, probably because this study has not had access to the opposition newspapers between 1801 and 1803. Analysis of the arguments deployed in the papers which maintained a sympathy for the aims of a moderated Revolution would have been extremely useful. But an examination of *The Times*, the liberal magazines and the accounts of British visitors to France during the Peace of Amiens has revealed valuable new information about the nature of shifts in British views of Bonaparte.

Opinions about Napoleon Bonaparte were certainly altered fundamentally by the coup of *Brumaire*. But reaction to the coup was not characterised by a

rejection of the revolutionist paradigm; instead Bonaparte was reconstructed as the military ruler of a revolutionary government. One of the most striking features of the discourse after *Brumaire* is how quickly the shift from civilian to military revolutionary government was assimilated through the deployment of the language of tyranny and comparisons between Bonaparte and Cromwell. Contemporaries were more interested in the opportunities presented by the events of the last two months of 1799 than they were in discussing the nature of the new government in detail.

This was almost certainly because news of the coup was followed immediately by Bonaparte's offer to open peace negotiations.² This juxtaposition had a significant impact on the ways the nature of Bonaparte's office and his policies were analysed during the next two years. Although British commentators in the first six months of 1800 were primarily interested in whether Bonaparte was succeeding in reconciling the squabbling republican factions, recognition that success at this was a major step towards reopening peace negotiations was a major subtext of the period. It moved into the forefront of reporting and commentary from the summer of 1800, in response to negotiations undertaken for an end to the Revolutionary war.

The final shift in the conception of Bonaparte, to that of an unrestrained military ruler, occurred during the Peace of Amiens. Bonaparte's assumption of office for life in the summer of 1802 seems to have been the major stimulus, although it is probably not helpful to attempt to ascribe a single event or point at which the shift occurred. The sixth chapter has revealed that there was an awareness from *Brumaire* itself that the introduction of military power into revolutionary government. The events of the summer of 1802 removed lingering

² This is recognised by Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, p. 171.

hopes that Bonaparte would be content with the hybrid government he had largely shaped. The campaign for the life consulship signalled a definite shift from the occupation of an elected, and therefore at least technically limited, position to one which was not subject to any obvious restraints. The creation of the Legion of Honour at the same time indicated that Bonaparte was attempting to divert the sovereignty previously vested in the Revolution into his own person.

The resumption of French expansionism in the Mediterranean and in Switzerland from the autumn of 1802 was not attributed to the expansion of revolutionary ideologies, but to the ambitions of the First Consul. Revolutionary undertones remained, however. *The Times* continued to imply that the erratic nature of Bonaparte's nature demonstrated the inability of revolutionary states to co-exist with legitimate ones; but it also conceived Bonaparte as a military dictator repressing the liberties of his people. It would be replacing one kind of teleology with another, however, to argue that contemporaries regarded this shift as an inevitable one. One is tempted to speculate that without the prompt offered by the life consulship, Bonaparte might have remained as that complex hybrid of military figure and revolutionary ruler which characterised his British conception in the two years after *Brumaire*.

British views of Bonaparte travelled a long way, then, from that spring of 1796 when the campaign of the young and zealous republican general in Italy was reported, to the spring of 1803 when he was seen to be in unchallenged control of a France with an hegemony over the whole of Western Europe. This study has not attempted to be the definitive account of these changes; rather, it has re-assessed the subject and attempted to reorient the historical picture away from the static accounts of previous historians. By emphasising the importance of assessing the importance of themes in their chronological context, this thesis has been able to posit a revolutionist paradigm for the seven years examined, and has been able to

discover significant new information about the shifts which occurred during these years.

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This investigation concludes with several questions which have been revealed as deserving of closer investigation. The first is the strength of revolutionism as a force in the British world view in and beyond the 1790s. The content of this thesis demonstrates that revolutionism as an issue did not disappear in November 1799, as historians have too often assumed. It was reconfigured after *Brumaire* and remained a significant subtext until at least the beginning of the Napoleonic war. This writer strongly suspects that a case can be made for its persistence after 1803, and recommends further detailed study along these lines to 1815 to assess whether this suggestion can be substantiated. The continuing significance of legitimacy, reflected in *The Times*, and the readiness of other papers to ignore this in favour of a regime which seemed to be moderating the Revolution, prompts this writer to recommend also an examination of the relationship between legitimacy and revolutionism. And looking finally for a moment to the wider question of Britain and the French Revolution, historians of British views of the Revolution after 1793 must account for the thorny issue of the relationship between civilian French governments and the expression of revolutionary zeal through military conquest.

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